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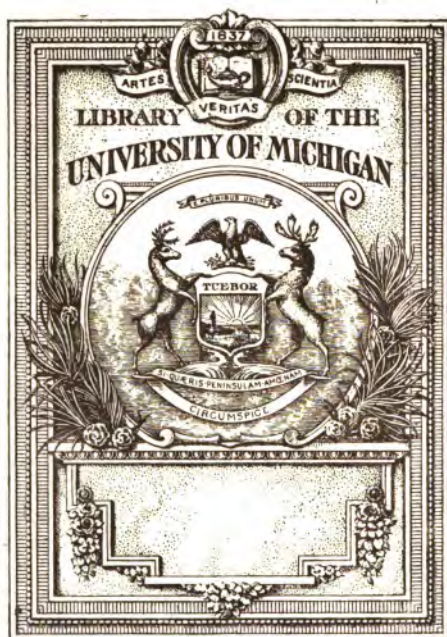
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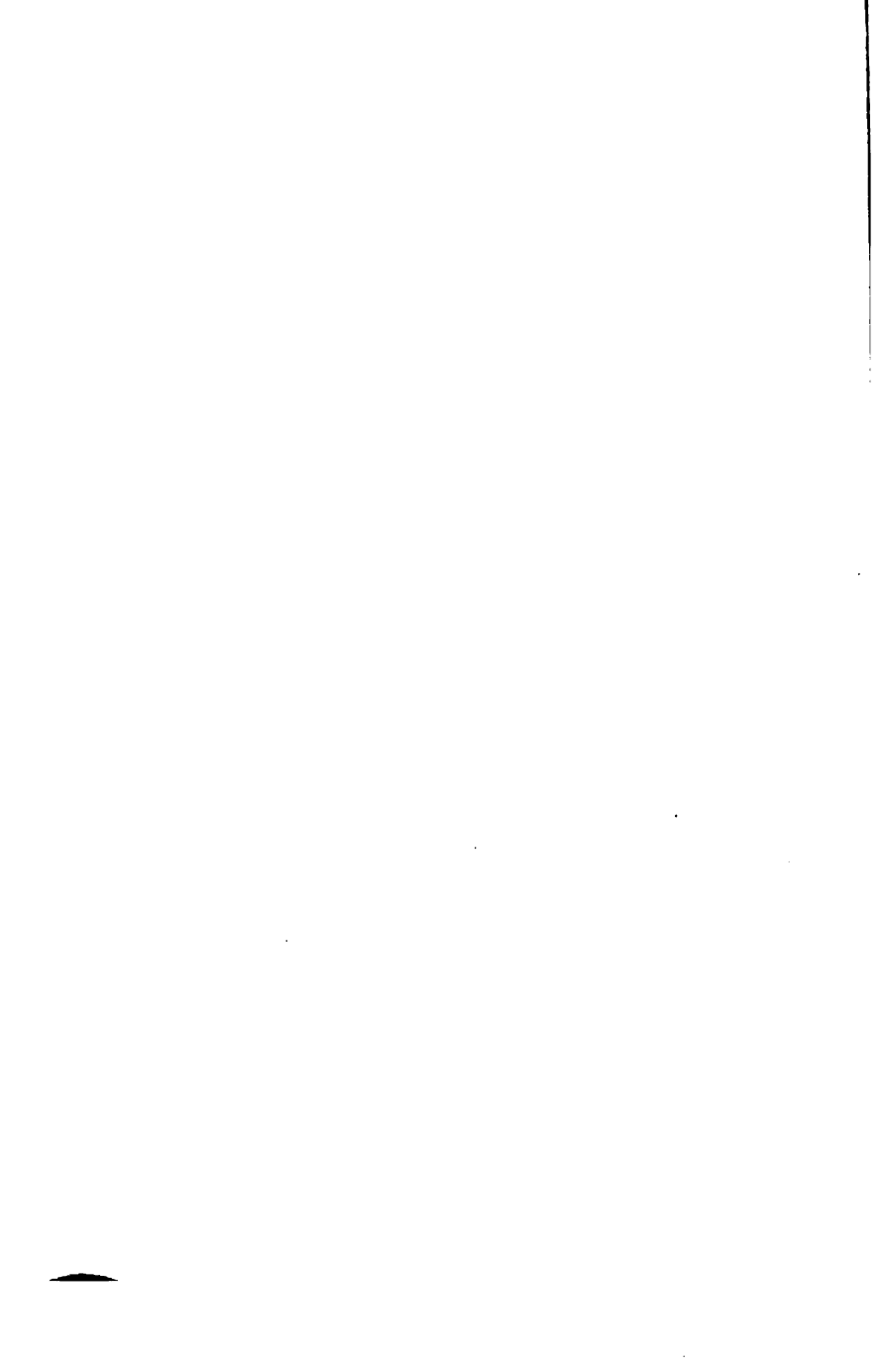
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*House Sorrow*

“WELL, AND WHEN DID YIZ ORDER IT TURNED ON?”

# AN DWELLER IN COMMUTER.

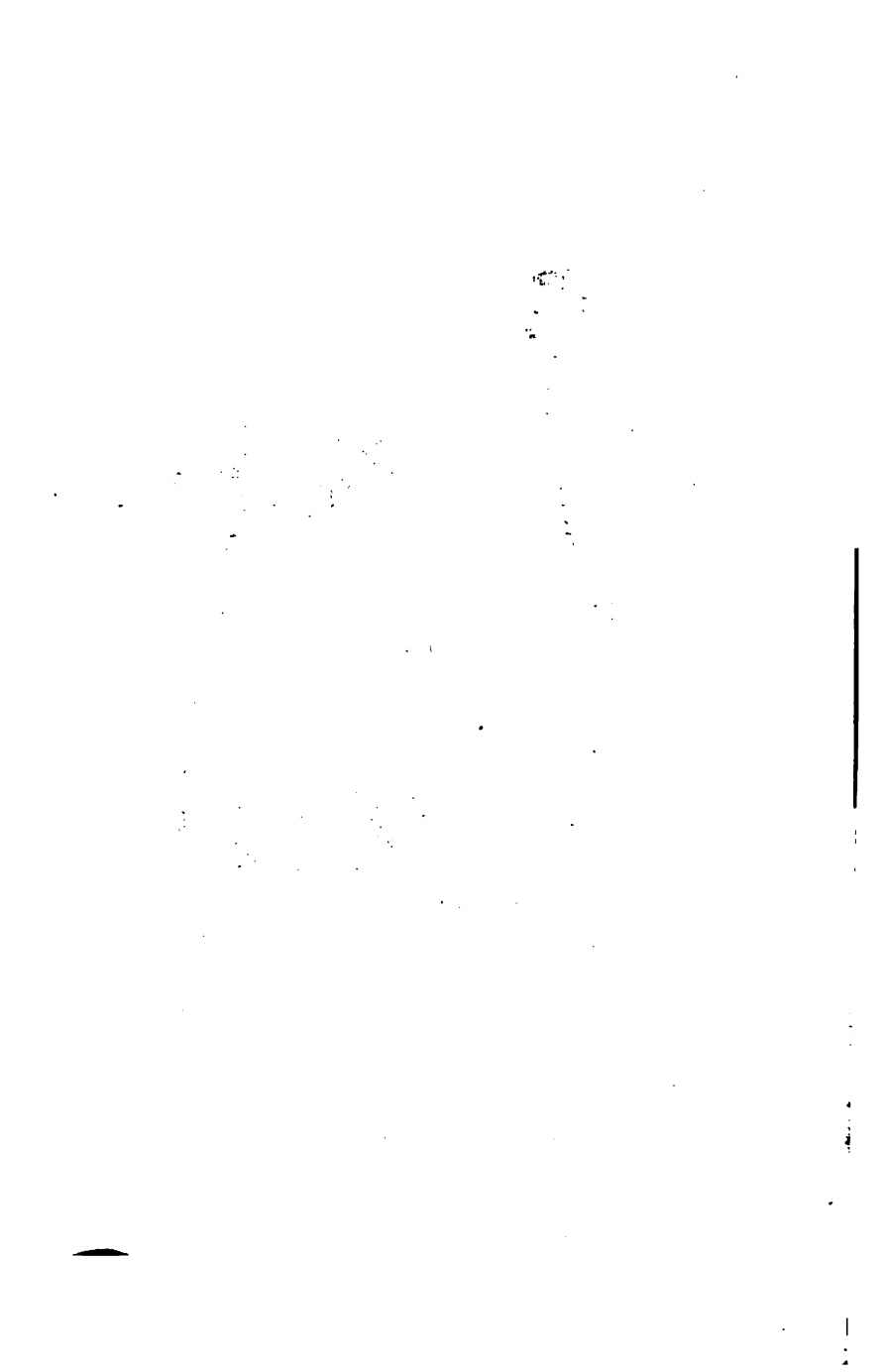
THE STORY OF A LIFE IN THE  
AND A LITTLE OF THE WORLD.

BY  
ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE.

"THE GREAT EASTERN"  
"THE GREAT WESTERN" ETC.



NEW YORK AND LONDON  
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS  
MCMVII





FROM  
**VAN DWELLER**  
TO  
**COMMUTER**

THE STORY OF A STRENUOUS QUEST FOR A HOME  
AND A LITTLE HEARTH AND GARDEN

BY  
**ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE**

AUTHOR OF  
"THE BREAD LINE"  
"THE GREAT WHITE WAY" ETC.



NEW YORK AND LONDON  
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS  
MCMVII

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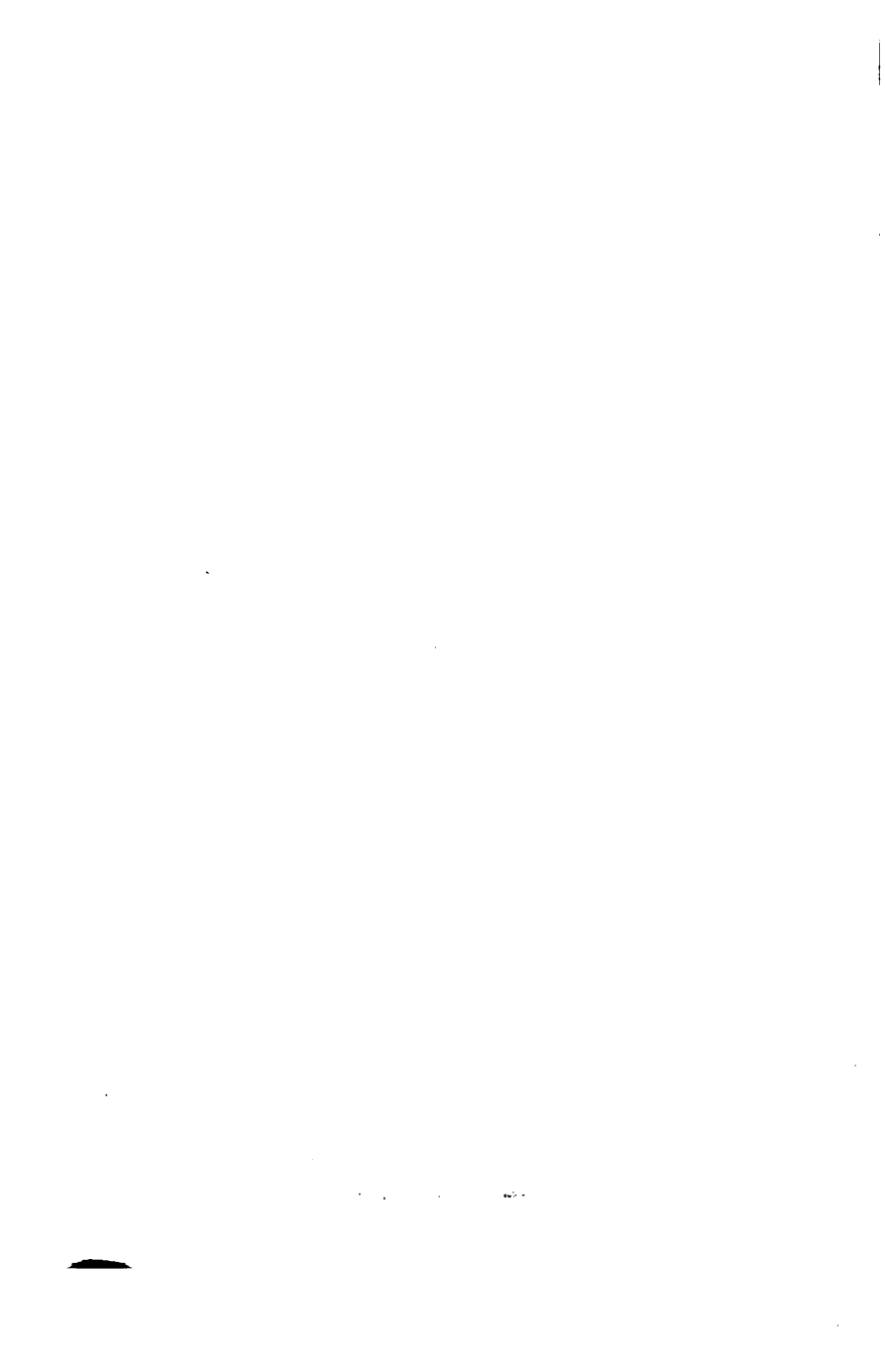
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**PART I**  
**THE VAN DWELLERS**





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# THE VAN DWELLERS

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## I.

### *The First Home in the Metropolis.*

WE had never lived in New York. This fact will develop anyway, as I proceed, but somehow it seems fairer to everybody to state it in the first sentence and have it over with.

Still, we had heard of flats in a vague way, and as we drew near the Metropolis the Little Woman bought papers of the train boy and began to read advertisements under the head of "Flats and Apartments to Let."

I remember that we wondered then what was the difference. Now, having tried both, we are wiser. The difference ranges from three hundred dollars a year up. There are also minor details, such as palms in the vestibule, exposed plumbing, and uniformed hall service—perhaps an elevator, but these things are immaterial. The price is the difference.

We bought papers, as I have said. It was the beginning of our downfall, and the first step was easy—even alluring. We compared prices and descriptions and put down addresses. The descriptions were all that could be desired and the prices absurdly modest. We had heard that living in the city was expensive; now we put down the street and number of “four large light rooms and improvements, \$18.00,” and were properly indignant at

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those who had libeled the landlords of Gotham.

Next morning we stumbled up four dim flights of stairs, groped through a black passage-way and sidled out into a succession of gloomy closets, wondering what they were for. Our conductor stopped and turned.

"This is it," he announced. "All nice light rooms, and improvements."

It was our first meeting with a flat. Also, with a janitor. The Little Woman was first to speak.

"Ah, yes, would you mind telling us—we're from the West, you know—just which are the—the improvements, and which the rooms?"

This was lost on the janitor. He merely thought us stupid and regarded us with pitying disgust as he indicated a rusty little range,

and disheartening water arrangements in one corner. There may have been stationary tubs, too, bells, and a dumb waiter, but without the knowledge of these things which we acquired later they escaped notice. What we *could* see was that there was no provision for heat that we could discover, and no sunshine.

We referred to these things, also to the fact that the only entrance to our parlor would be through the kitchen, while the only entrance to our kitchen would be almost certainly over either a coal-box, an ironing board, or the rusty little stove, any method of which would require a certain skill, as well as care in the matter of one's clothes.

But these objections seemed unreasonable, no doubt, for the janitor, who was of Yorkshire extraction, be-

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came taciturn and remarked briefly that the halls were warmed and that nobody before had ever required more heat than they got from these and the range, while as for the sun, he couldn't change that if he wanted to, leaving us to infer that if he only wanted to he could remodel almost everything else about the premises in short order.

We went away in the belief that he was a base pretender, "clad in a little brief authority." We had not awakened as yet to the fulness of janitorial tyranny and power.

We went farther uptown. We reasoned that rentals would be more reasonable and apartments less contracted up there.

Ah, me! As I close my eyes now and recall, as in a kaleidoscope, the perfect wilderness of flats we have passed through since then,

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it seems strange that some dim foreboding of it all did not steal in to rob our hearts of the careless joys of anticipation.

But I digress. We took the elevated and looked out the windows as we sped along. The whirling streets, with their endless procession of front steps, bewildered us.

By and by we were in a vast district, where all the houses were five-storied, flat-roofed, and seemed built mainly to hold windows. This was Flatland—the very heart of it—that boundless territory to the northward of Central Park, where nightly the millions sleep.

Here and there were large signs on side walls and on boards along the roof, with which we were now on a level as the train whirled us along. These quoted the number of rooms, and prices, and some of them were almost irresistible. “6

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All Light Rooms, \$22.00," caught us at length, and we got off to investigate.

They were better than those downtown. There was a possibility of heat and you did not get to the parlor by climbing over the kitchen furniture. Still, the apartment as a whole lacked much that we had set our hearts on, while it contained some things that we were willing to do without.

It contained, also, certain novelties. Among these were the stationary washtubs in the kitchen; the dumb-waiter, and a speaking-tube connection with the basement.

The janitor at this place was a somber Teutonic female, soiled as to dress, and of the common Dutch-slipper variety.

We were really attracted by the next apartment, where we discovered for the first time the small

button in the wall that, when pressed, opens the street door below. This was quite jolly, and we played with it some minutes, while the colored janitor grinned at our artlessness, and said good things about the place. Our hearts went out to this person, and we would gladly have cast our lot with him.

Then he told us the price, and we passed on.

I have a confused recollection of the other flats and apartments we examined on that first day of our career, or "progress," as the recent Mr. Hogarth would put it. Our minds had not then become trained to that perfection of mentality which enables the skilled flat-hunter to carry for days visual ground-plans, elevations, and improvements, of any number of "desirable apartments," and be ready to



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transcribe the same in black and white at a moment's notice.

I recall one tunnel and one roof garden. Also one first floor with bake-shop attachment. The latter suggested a business enterprise for the Little Woman, while the Precious Ones, who were with us at this stage, seemed delighted at my proposition of "keeping store."

Many places we did not examine. Of these the janitors merely popped out their heads—frowsy heads, most of them—and gave the number of rooms and the price in a breath of defiance and mixed ale. At length I was the only one able to continue the search.

I left the others at a friendly drug store, and wandered off alone. Being quite untrammelled now I went as if by instinct two blocks west and turned. A park was

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there—a park set up on edge, as it were, with steps leading to a battlement at the top. This was attractive, and I followed along opposite, looking at the houses.

Presently I came to a new one. They were just finishing it, and sweeping the shavings from the ground-floor flat—a gaudy little place—the only one in the house untaken.

It was not very light, and it was not very large, while the price was more than we had expected to pay. But it was clean and new, and the landlord, who was himself on the premises, offered a month's rent free to the first tenant.

I ran all the way back to the Little Woman, and urged her to limp as hastily as possible, fearing it might be gone before she could get there. When I realized that the landlord had held it for me in

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the face of several applicants (this was his own statement), I was ready to fall on his neck, and paid a deposit hastily to secure the premises.

Then we wandered about looking at things, trying the dumb waiter, the speaking tube, and the push-button, leading to what the Precious Ones promptly named the "locker-locker" door, owing to a clicking sound in the lock when the door sprang open.

We were in a generous frame of mind, and walked from room to room praising the excellence of everything, including a little gingerbread mantel in the dining-room, in which the fireplace had been set crooked,—from being done in the dark, perhaps,—the concrete backyard, with its clothesline pole, the decorated ceilings, the precipitous park opposite that was pres-

---

ently to shut off each day at two P.M. our western, and only, sunlight; even the air-shaft that came down to us like a well from above, and the tiny kitchen, which in the gathering evening was too dark to reveal all its attractions.

As for the Precious Ones, they fairly raced through our new possession, shrieking their delight.

We had a home in the great city at last.

## II.

### *Metropolitan Beginnings.*

WE set out gaily and early, next morning, to buy our things.

We had brought nothing with us that could not be packed into our trunks, except my fishing rod, some inherited bedding and pictures which the Little Woman declined to part with, and two jaded and overworked dolls belonging to the Precious Ones. Manifestly this was not enough to begin housekeeping on, even in a flat of contracted floor-space and limitless improvements.

In fact the dolls only had arrived.

---

They had come as passengers. The other things were still trundling along somewhere between Oshkosh and Hoboken, by slow freight.

We had some idea of where we wanted to go when we set forth, but a storehouse with varied and almost irresistible windows enticed us and we went no farther. It was a mighty department store and we were informed that we need not pass its doors again until we had selected everything we needed from a can-opener to a grand piano. We didn't, and the can-opener became ours.

Also other articles. We enjoyed buying things, and even to this day I recall with pleasure our first great revel in a department store.

For the most part we united our judgments and acted jointly. But at times we were enticed apart by

fascinating novelties and selected recklessly, without consultation.

As for the Precious Ones, they galloped about, demanding that we should buy everything in sight, with a total disregard of our requirements or resources.

It was wonderful though how cheap everything seemed, and how much we seemed to need, even for a beginning. It was also wonderful how those insidious figures told in the final settlement.

Let it be understood, I cherish no resentment toward the salesmen. Reflecting now on the matter, I am, on the whole, grateful. They found out where we were from, and where we were going to live, and they sold us accordingly.

I think we interested them, and that they rather liked us. If not, I am sure they would have sold us worse things and more of them.

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They could have done so, easily. Hence my gratitude to the salesmen; but the man at the transfer desk remains unforgiven.

I am satisfied, now, that he was an unscrupulous person, a perjured, case-hardened creature whom it is every man's duty to destroy. But at the time he seemed the very embodiment of good intentions.

He assured us heartily, as he gave us our change, that we should have immediate delivery. We had explained at some length that this was important, and why. He waved us off with the assurance that we need give ourselves no uneasiness in the matter—that, in all probability, the matting we had purchased as a floor basis would be there before we were.

He knew that this would start us post-haste for our apartment,



which it did. We even ran, waving and shouting, after a particular car when another just like it was less than a half block behind.

We breathed more easily when we arrived at our new address and found that we were in good season. When five minutes more had passed, however, and still no signs of our matting, a vague uneasiness began to manifest itself.

It was early and there was plenty of time, of course ; but there was something about the countless delivery wagons that passed and re-passed without stopping which impressed us with the littleness of our importance in this great whirl of traffic, and the ease with which a transfer clerk's promise, easily and cheerfully made, might be as easily and as cheerfully forgotten.

I said presently that I would go

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around the corner and order coal for the range, ice for the refrigerator, and groceries for us all. I added that the things from down town would surely be there on my return, and that any way I wanted to learn where the nearest markets were. Had I known it, I need not have taken this trouble. Our names in the mail-box just outside the door would have summoned the numerous emissaries of trade, as by magic.

It did so, in fact, for the Little Woman put the name in while I was gone, and on my return I found her besieged by no less than three butchers and grocerymen, while two rival milkmen were explaining with diagrams the comparative richness of their respective cans and bottles. The articles I had but just purchased were even then being sent up on the dumb

waiter, but our furnishings from below were still unheard from.

A horrible fear that I had given the wrong address began to grow upon us. The Little Woman was calm, but regarded me accusingly. She said she didn't see how it could have happened, when in every accent of her voice I could detect memories of other things I had done in this line—things which, at the time, had seemed equally impossible.

She said she hadn't been paying attention when I gave the number or she would have known. Of course, she said, the transfer clerk couldn't make a mistake putting it down—he was too accustomed to such things, and of course I must have given it to him correctly—only, it did seem strange——

We began debating feverishly as to the advisability of my setting

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out at once on a trip down town to see about it. We concluded to telephone.

I hastened around to the drug store not far away and "helloed" and repeated and fumed and swore in agony for half an hour, but I came back in high spirits. The address was correct and the delivery wagons were out. I expected to find them at the door when I got back, but found only the Little Woman, sitting on the doorstep, still waiting.

We told each other that after all it must necessarily take some little time to get up this far, but that the matting would certainly be along presently, now, and that it would take but a short time to lay it. Then we would have a good start, and even if everything didn't come to-night it would be jolly to put the new mattresses down on the

nice clean matting, and to get dinner the best way we could—like camping out. Then we walked back and forth in the semi-light of our empty little place and said how nice it was, and where we should set the furniture and hang the pictures: and stepped off the size of the rooms that all put together were not so big as had been our one big sitting-room in the West.

As for the Precious Ones, they were wildly happy. They had never had a real playhouse before, big enough to live in, and this was quite in accordance with their ideals. They were "visiting" and "keeping store" and "cooking," and quarreling, and having a perfectly beautiful time with their two disreputable dolls, utterly regardless of the shadow of foreboding and desolation that grew ever thicker as the hours passed, while

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the sun slipped down behind the steep stone-battlemented park opposite, and brought no matting, no furniture, no anything that would make our little nest habitable for the swiftly coming night.

But when it became too dark for them to see to play, they came clamorously out to where we stood on the doorstep, still waiting, and demanded in one breath that we tell them immediately when the things were coming, where they were to get supper, how we were to sleep, and if they couldn't have a light.

I was glad that I could give them something. I said that it was pretty early for a light, but that they should have it. I went in and opened a gas burner, and held a match to it. There was no result. I said there was air in the pipes. I lit another match, and held it till

it burned my fingers. There *was* air in the pipes, I suppose, but there was no gas. I hurried down to inform the janitor.

She was a stern-featured Hibernian, with a superior bearing. I learned later that she had seen better days. In fact, I have yet to find the janitor that *hasn't* seen better days, or the tenant, either, for that matter, but this is another digression. She regarded me with indifference when I told her there was no gas. When I told her that we *wanted* gas, she inspected me as if this was something unusual and interesting in a tenant's requirements. Finally she said :—

“ Well, and when did yez order it turned on ? ”

“ Why,” I said, “ I haven't ordered it at all. I thought——”

“ Yez thought you could get it of me, did yez ? ”

---

I admitted that this seemed reasonable, but in view of the fact of the water being turned on, I had really given the matter of gas no definite consideration.

I think she rather pitied my stupendous ignorance. At least she became more gentle than she had seemed at the start, or than she ever was afterwards.

She explained at some length that I must go first to the gas office, leave a deposit to secure them, in case of my sudden and absent-minded departure from the neighborhood, and ask that a man be sent around to put in a meter, and turn on the gas in our apartment. With good luck some result might be obtained by the following evening.

I stumbled miserably up the dark stairs, and dismally explained, while the Precious Ones became



more clamorous for food and light, as the shades of night gathered. I said I would go and get some candles, so in case the things came—not necessarily the matting—we didn't really need the matting first, anyway—it would get scuffed and injured if it were put down first—it was the other things we needed—things to eat and go to bed with!—

When I came back there was a wild excitement around our entrance. A delivery wagon had driven up in great haste, and by the light of the street lamp I recognized on it the sign of our department store. A hunted-looking driver had leaped out and was hastily running over his book. Yes, it was our name—our things had come at last—better late than never! The driver was diving back into his wagon and presently

hauled out something long and round and wrapped up.

"Here you are," he said triumphantly. "Sign for it, please."

"But," we gasped, "where's the rest of the things? There's ever so much more."

"Don't know, lady. This is all I've got. Sign, please, it's getting late."

"But——"

He was gone. We carried in our solitary package and opened it by the feeble flickering of a paraffine dip.

It was a Japanese umbrella-holder!

The Precious Ones and their wretched dolls held a war dance around it and admired the funny men on the sides. To us it was an Oriental mockery.

Sadly we gathered up our bags, and each taking by the hand a

hungry little creature who clasped  
a forlorn doll to a weary little bosom,  
we set forth to seek food and  
shelter in the thronging but pitiless  
city.

## III.

*Learning by Experience.*

**D**AY by day, and piece by piece, our purchases appeared. Now and then a delivery wagon would drive up in hot haste and deliver a stew-pan, or perhaps a mouse trap. At last, and on the third day, a mattress.

Of course, I had been down and protested, ere this. The cheerful liar at the transfer desk had been grieved, astonished, thunderstruck at my tale. He would investigate, and somebody would be discharged, at once. This thought soothed me. It was blood that I wanted. Just plain blood, and plenty of it. I

know now that it was the transfer-man's blood that I needed, but for the moment I was appeased and believed in him.

Our matting, promised within two hours from the moment of purchase, was the last thing to arrive. This on the fourth day—or was it the fifth? I was too mad by this time to remember dates. What I do recall is that we laid it ourselves. We had not, as yet, paid for the laying, and we said that rather than give that shameless firm another dollar we would lay that matting if it killed us.

Morally it did. I have never been quite the same man since that terrible experience. The Little Woman helped stretch, and held the lamp, while I pounded my thumb and swore. She said she had never realized until that night how well and satisfactorily I could

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swear. It seemed to comfort her and she abetted it.

I know now that the stripes on matting never match. We didn't know it then, and we tried to make them. We pulled and hauled, and I got down on my stomach, with one ear against the wall, and burned the other one on the lamp chimney which the Little Woman, in her anxiety to help, held too close. When I criticised her inclination to overdo matters, she observed that I would probably be able to pull the matting along more easily if I wouldn't lie down on the piece I was trying to pull. Then we both said some things that I suppose we shall regret to our dying day. It was a terrible night. When morning came, grim and ghastly, life seemed a failure, and I could feel that I had grown old.

But with breakfast and coffee and sunshine came renewed hope.

We were settled at last, and our little place looked clean and more like a playhouse than ever.

Our acquaintance with the janitor was not, as yet, definite. I had met her once or twice informally, it is true, but as yet we could not be said to have reached any basis of understanding. As to her appearance, she was brawny and Irish, with a forbidding countenance. She had a husband whom we never saw—he being employed outside—but whose personality, nevertheless, became a factor in our subsequent relations.

Somehow, we instinctively avoided the people below stairs, as cats do canines, though we had no traditions concerning janitors, and we are naturally the most friendly and democratic people in the world.

Matters went on very well for a time. We congratulated ourselves every morning on how nice and handy everything was, now that we were once settled, and laughed over our recent difficulties. The Precious Ones were in their glory. They had appropriated the little four-by-six closet back of the kitchen—it had been shown to us as a servant's room—and presently we heard them playing "dumb waiter," "janitor," "locker-locker door," "laying matting," and other new and entertaining games incidental to a new life and conditions. The weather remained warm for a time, and it was all novel and interesting. We added almost daily to our household effects, and agreed that we had been lucky in securing so pleasant and so snug a nest.

But one morning when we awoke



it was cold. It was early October, but there was a keen frosty feeling in the air that sent us shivering to the kitchen range, wondering if steam would be coming along presently. It did not come, and after breakfast I went down to interview our janitor on the subject.

I could see that she was not surprised at my errand. The incident of the gas supply had prepared her for any further eccentricity on my part. She merely waited with mild interest to hear what I really could do when I tried. Then she remarked tersely :—

“Yez get steam on the fifteenth.”

“Quite so,” I assented, “but it’s cold to-day. We may not want it on the fifteenth. We do want it now.”

These facts did not seem to impress her.

“Yez get steam on the fifteenth,”

---

she repeated, with even more decision, and I could tell from her manner that the interview was closed.

I went back to where the Little Woman was getting breakfast (she had laughed at the idea of a servant in our dainty little nest) and during the morning she and the Precious Ones hugged the kitchen range. In the afternoon the sun looked in at our parlor windows and made the room cheerful for an hour. Then it went out behind the precipitous hillside park opposite, and with the chill shadow that crept up over our windows came a foreboding that was bad for the romance and humor of the situation. It had been like a spiritless Arctic day.

In the evening we crept to the kitchen range; and we hibernated there, more or less, while the cold

spell lasted. It was warm by the fifteenth, but on that day, in the hours of early dawn, we were awakened by a Wagnerian overture in the steam radiators. It became an anvil chorus ere long and there was no more sleep. By breakfast time we had all the things open that we could get open to let in fresh air and we were shouting to each other above the din and smell of the new pipes. We made allowance, of course, for the fact that things *were* new, and we said we were glad there would be enough heat in cold weather, anyway, by which you will see how really innocent we were in those days.

It grew cold in earnest by November first. And then, all at once, the gold-painted radiators, as if they had shown what they could do and were satisfied, seemed to lose enthusiasm. Now and then

in the night, when we didn't want it, they would remember and start a little movement from the Gotterdammerung, but by morning they seemed discouraged again and during the day they were of fitful and unresponsive temperature.

At last I went once more to the janitor, though with some hesitation, I confess. I don't know why. I am not naturally timid, and usually demand and obtain the rights of ordinary citizenship. Besides, I was ignorant then of janitorial tyranny as the accepted code. It must have been instinct. I said :—

“What's the matter with our heat up-stairs?”

She answered :—

“An' it's what's the matter with yer heat, is it? Well, thin, an' what is the matter with yer heat up-stairs?”

She said this, and also looked at me, as if she thought our heat might be afflicted with the mumps or measles or have a hare lip, and as if I was to blame for it.

"The matter is that we haven't got any," I said, getting somewhat awakened.

She looked at me fully a minute this time.

"Yez haven't got any! Yez haven't got any heat! An' here comes the madam from the top floor yesterday, a bilin' over, an' sayin' that they're sick with *too much* heat. What air yez, then, sallymandhers?"

"But yesterday isn't to-day," I urged, "and I'm not the woman on the top floor. We're just the people on the first floor and we're cold. We want heat, not comparisons."

I wonder now how I was ever

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bold enough to say these things. It was my ignorance, of course. I would not dream of speaking thus disrespectfully to a janitor to-day. I had a dim idea at the time that the landlord had something to do with his own premises, and that if heat were not forthcoming I could consult him and get action in the matter. I know better than that, now, and my enlightenment on this point was not long delayed.

It was about twelve o'clock that night, I think, that we were aroused by a heart-breaking, furniture-smashing disturbance. At first I thought murder was being done on our doorstep. Then I realized that it was below us. I sat up in bed, my hair prickling. The Little Woman, in the next room with the Precious Ones, called to me in a voice that was full of emotion. I answered, "Sh!"

Then we both sat still in the dark while our veins grew icy. Somebody below was begging and pleading for mercy, while somebody else was commanding quiet in a voice that meant bloodshed as an alternative. At intervals there was a fierce struggle, mingled with destruction and hair-lifting language.

Was the janitor murdering her husband? Or could it be that it was the other way, and that tardy justice had overtaken the janitor—that, at the hands of her husband or some outraged tenant, she was meeting a well-merited doom? Remembering her presence and muscular proportions I could not hope that this was possible.

The Little Woman whispered tremblingly that we ought to do something. I whispered back that I was quite willing she should, if

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she wanted to, but that for my own part I had quit interfering in Hibernian domestic difficulties some years since. In the morning I would complain to the landlord of our service. I would stand it no longer.

Meantime, it was not yet morning, and the racket below went on. The very quantity of it was reassuring. There was too much of it for real murder. The Precious Ones presently woke up and cried. None of us got to sleep again until well-nigh morning, even after the commotion below had degenerated into occasional moans, and final silence.

Before breakfast I summoned up all my remaining courage and went down there. The janitor herself came to the door. She was uninjured, so far as I could discover. I was pretty mad, and the fact



that I was afraid of her made me madder.

"What do you mean?" I demanded, "by making such a horrible racket down here in the middle of the night?"

She regarded me with an amazed look, as if I had been dreaming.

"I want to know," I repeated, "what was all that noise down here last night?"

She smiled grimly.

"Oh, an' is *that* it? Yez want to know what was the *n'ise*, do yez? Well, thin, it was none o' yer business, *that's* what it was. Now go on wid yez, an' tend to yer *own* business, if yez have any. D' y' mind?"

With the information that I was going at once to the landlord, I turned and hurried up the stairs to avoid violence. She promptly followed me.

“ So yez’ll be after telling the landlord, will yez? Well, thin, yez can just tell the landlord, an’ yez can just sind him to me. You’ll sind Tim Reilly to me. Maybe yez don’t know that Tim Reilly once carried bricks fer my old daddy, an’ many’s the time I’ve given him a bite an’ a sup at our back door. Oh, yes, sind him to me. Sind Tim Reilly to me, an’ I’ll see, when me ol’ man comes home late wid a bit of liquor in his head, if it’s not for me to conthrol ’im after our own fashions, widout the inquisitin’ of people who better be mindin’ of their own n’ise. Kep’ yez awake, eh? Well, thin, see that yez never keep anybody else awake, an’ sind Tim Reilly to me! ”

She was gone. We realized then that she had seen better days. So had we. Later, when I passed her

on the front steps, she nodded in her usual expressionless, uncompromising manner.

I did not go to the landlord. It would be useless, we said. The helplessness of our position was becoming daily more evident.

And with the realization of this we began to discover other defects. We found that the house faced really almost north instead of west, and that the sun now went behind the precipice opposite nearly as soon as it touched the tops of our windows, while the dining-room and kitchen were wretchedly dark all day long.

Then, too, the crooked fireplace in the former was a disfigurement, the rooms were closets, or cells, the paper abominable, the wardrobe damp, the drawers swollen or exasperating misfits, the whole apartment the flimsiest sort of a cheap,

showy, contract structure, such as no self-respecting people should occupy.

We said we would move. We recited our wrongs to each other in detail, and began consulting Sunday papers immediately.

#### IV.

#### *Our First Move.*

**I**T was the Little Woman who selected our next habitation.

Education accumulates rapidly in the Metropolis, and I could see that she already possessed more definite views on "flats and apartments" than she had acquired on many another subject familiar to her from childhood.

Politics, for instance, do not exist for the Little Woman. Presidents come and go, torchlight processions bloom and fade and leave not so much as a wind-riffle on the sands of memory. The stock market, too, was at this time but a

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name to her. Both of us have acquired knowledge since in this direction, but that is another story. Shares might rise and fall in those early days, and men clutch at each other's throats as ruin dragged them down. The Little Woman saw but a page of figures in the evening paper and perhaps regarded them as a sort of necessary form—somewhat in the nature of the congressional reports which nobody ever reads. Yet all her life she had been amid these vital issues, and now, behold, after two short months she had acquired more information on New York apartment life than she would ever have on both the others put together. She knew now what we needed and she would find it. I was willing that this should be so. There were other demands on my time, and besides, I had not then contracted

the flat-disease in its subsequent virulent form.

She said, and I agreed with her, that it was a mistake to be so far from the business center. That the time, car fare, and nerve tissue wasted between Park Place and Harlem were of more moment than a few dollars' difference in the monthly rent.

We regarded this conclusion somewhat in the light of a discovery, and wondered why people of experience had not made it before. Ah, me ! we have made many discoveries since that time. Discoveries as old as they are always new. The first friendly ray of March sunlight ; the first green leaf in the park ; the first summer glow of June ; the first dead leaf and keen blast of autumn ; these, too, have wakened within us each year a new understanding of our needs and of the

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ideal habitation ; these, too, have set us to discovering as often as they come around, as men shall still discover so long as seasons of snow and blossom pass, and the heart of youth seeks change. But here I am digressing again, when I should be getting on with my story.

As I have said, the Little Woman selected our next home. The Little Woman and the Precious Ones. They were gone each day for several hours and returned each evening wearied to the bone but charged heavily with information.

The Little Woman was no longer a novice. "Single and double flats," "open plumbing," "tiled vestibule," "uniformed hall service," and other stock terms, came trippingly from her tongue.

Of some of the places she had diagrams. Of others she volunteered to draw them from memory.



I did not then realize that this was the first symptom of flat-collecting in its acute form, or that in examining her crude pencilings I was courting the infection. I could not foresee that the slight yet definite and curious variation in the myriad city apartments might become a fascination at last, and the desire for possession a mania more enslaving than even the acquirement of rare rugs or old china and bottles.

I examined the Little Woman's assortment with growing interest while the Precious Ones chorused their experiences, which consisted mainly in the things they had been allowed to eat and drink, and from the nature of these I suspected occasional surrender and bribery on the part of the Little Woman.

It was a place well down town

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that we chose. It was a second floor, open in the rear, and there was sunlight most of the day. The rooms were really better than the ones we had. They could not be worse, we decided—a fallacy, for I have never seen a flat so bad that there could not be a worse one—and the price was not much higher. Also, there was a straight fireplace in the dining-room, which the Precious Ones described as being “lovelly,” and the janitress was a humble creature who had won the Little Woman’s heart by unburdening herself of numerous sad experiences and bitter wrongs, besides a number of perfectly just opinions concerning janitors, individually and at large.

Altogether the place seemed quite in accordance with our present views. I paid a month’s rent in advance the next morning, and



"THE PRECIOUS ONES WERE RACING ABOUT AMONG  
BOXES AND BARRELS IN UNALLOYED  
HAPPINESS"



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during the day the Little Woman engaged a moving man.

She was packing when I came home and the Precious Ones were racing about among boxes and barrels in unalloyed happiness. It did not seem possible that we had bought so much or that I could have put so many tacks in the matting.

The moving men would be there with their van by daylight next morning, she said. (It seems that the man at the office had told her that we would have to get up early to get ahead of him, and she had construed this statement literally.) So we toiled far into the night and then crept wearily to bed in our dismantled nest, to toss wakefully through the few remaining hours of darkness, fearful that the summons of the forehanded and expeditious moving man would find us in slumber and unprepared.

We were deeply grateful to him that he did not arrived before we had finished our early and scrappy breakfast. Then presently, when we were ready for him and he did not appear, we were still appreciative, for we said to each other that he was giving us a little extra time so that we would not feel upset and hurried. Still, it would be just as well if he would come, now, so that we might get moved and settled before night.

It had been a bright, pleasant morning, but as the forenoon advanced the sky darkened and it grew bitterly cold. Gloom settled down without and the meager steam supply was scarcely noticeable in our bare apartment. The Precious Ones ran every minute to the door to watch for the moving van and came back to us with blue noses and icy hands. We began to

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wonder if something had gone wrong. Perhaps a misunderstanding of the address—illness or sudden death on the part of the man who had made the engagement—perhaps—

I went around at last to make inquiries. A heavy, dusty person looked into the soiled book and ran his finger down the page.

“That’s right!” he announced. “Address all correct. Van on the way around there now.”

I hurried back comforted. I do not believe in strong language, but that heavy individual with the soiled book was a dusty liar. There is no other word to express it—if there was, and a stronger one, I would use it. He was a liar by instinct and a prevaricator by trade. The van was not at our door when I returned. Neither had it started in our direction.

We had expected to get down to our new quarters by noon and enjoy a little lunch at a near-by restaurant before putting things in order. At lunch time the van had still not appeared and there was no near-by restaurant. The Precious Ones began to demand food and the Little Woman laboriously dug down into several receptacles before she finally brought forth part of a loaf of dry bread and a small, stony lump of butter. But to the Precious Ones it meant life and renewed joy.

The moving man came at one o'clock and in a great hurry. He seemed surprised that we were ready for him. There were so many reasons why he had not come sooner that we presently wondered how he had been able to get there at all. He was a merry, self-assured villain, and whistled as he



and his rusty assistant hustled our things out on the pavement, leaving all the doors open.

We were not contented with his manner of loading. The pieces we were proud of—our polished Louis-XIVth-Street furniture—he hurried into the darkness of his mighty van, while those pieces which in every household are regarded more as matters of use than ornament he left ranged along the pavement for all the world to gape at. Now and then he paused to recount incidents of his former varied experience and to try on such of my old clothes as came within his reach. I realized now why most of the things he wore did not fit him. His wardrobe was the accumulation of many movings.

His contempt for our furniture was poorly concealed. He suggested, kindly enough, however,

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that for living around in flats it was too light, and after briefly watching his handling of it I quite agreed with him. It was four o'clock when we were finally off, and the shades of evening had fallen before we reached our new home.

The generous and sympathetic welcome of our new janitress was like balm. She was low-voiced and her own sorrows had filled her with a broad understanding of human trials. She looked weary herself, and suggested *en passant* that the doctor had prescribed a little stimulant as being what she most needed, but that, of course, such things were not for the poor.

I had a bottle of material, distilled over the peat fires of Scotland. I knew where it was and I found it for her. Then the moving man came up with a number of our belongings and we forgot her in

the general turmoil and misery that ensued. Bump—bump—up the narrow stairs came our household goods and gods, and were planted at random about the floor, in shapeless heaps and pyramids. All were up, at last, except a few large pieces.

At this point in the proceedings the moving man and his assistant paused in their labors and the former fished out of his misfit clothing a greasy piece of paper which he handed me. I glanced at it under the jet and saw that it was my bill.

"Oh, all right," I said, "I can't stop just now. Wait till you get everything up, and then I can get at my purse and pay you."

He grinned at me.

"It's the boss's rule," he said, "to collect before the last things is taken out of the van."

I understood now why the pieces

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of value had gone in first. I also understood what the "boss" had meant in saying that we would have to get up early to get ahead of him. While I was digging up the money they made side remarks to each other on the lateness of the hour, the length of the stairs, and the heaviness of the pieces still to come. I gave them each a liberal tip in sheer desperation.

They were gone at last and we stood helplessly among our belongings that lay like flotsam and jetsam tossed up on a forbidding shore. The Precious Ones were whimpering with cold and hunger and want of sleep; the hopelessness of life pressed heavily upon us. Wearily we dragged something together for beds, and then crept out to find food. When we returned there was a dark object in the dim hall against our door. I struck

a match to see what it was. It a woman, and the sorrows of living and the troubles of dying were as naught to her. Above and about her hung the aroma of the peat fires of Scotland. It was our janitress, and she had returned us the empty bottle.

## V.

*A Boarding House for a Change.*

OUR new janitor was not altogether unworthy, but she drowned her sorrows too deeply and too often, and her praiseworthy attributes were incidentally submerged in the process. She was naturally kind-hearted, and meant to be industrious, but the demon of the still had laid its blight heavily upon her. We often found her grim and harsh, even to the point of malevolence, and she did not sweep the stairs.

We attempted diplomacy at first, and affected a deep sympathy with her wrongs. Then we tried bribery, and in this moral decline

I descended to things that I wish now neither to confess nor remember.

In desperation, at last, we complained to the agent, whereupon she promptly inundated her griefs even more deeply than usual, and sat upon the stairs outside our door to denounce us. She declared that a widow's curse was upon us, and that we would never prosper. It sounded gruesome at the time, but we have wondered since whether a grass widow's is as effective, for we learned presently that her spouse, though absent, was still in the flesh.

It was at the end of the second month that we agreed upon boarding. We said that after all house-keeping on a small scale was less agreeable and more expensive than one might suppose, viewing it at long range.

We looked over the papers again and found the inducements attractive. We figured out that we could get two handsome rooms and board for no more, and perhaps even a trifle less, than we had been expending on the doubtful luxury of apartment life. Then, too, there would be a freedom from the responsibility of marketing, and the preparation of food. We looked forward to being able to come down to the dining-room without knowing beforehand just what we were going to have.

It was well that we enjoyed this pleasure in anticipation. Viewed in the retrospective it is wanting. We did know exactly what we were going to have after the first week. We learned the combination perfectly in that time, and solved the system of deductive boarding-house economy within the month so correctly



that given the Sunday bill of fare we could have supplied in minute detail the daily program for the remainder of any week in the year.

Of course there is a satisfaction in working out a problem like that, and we did take a grim pleasure on Sunday afternoons in figuring just what we were to have for each meal on the rest of the days, but after the novelty of this wore off there began to be something really deadly about the exactness of this household machinery and the certainty of our calculations.

The prospect of Tuesday's stew, for instance, was not a thing to be disregarded or lightly disposed of. It assumed a definite place in the week's program as early as two o'clock on Sunday afternoon, and even when Tuesday was lived down and had linked itself to the past, the memory of its cuisine lingered and

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lay upon us until we even fancied that the very walls of our two plush upholstered rooms were tinged and tainted and permeated with the haunting sorrow of a million Tuesday stews.

It is true that we were no longer subject to janitorial dictation, or to the dumb-waiter complications which are often distressing to those who live at the top of the house and get the last choice of the meat and ice deliveries, but our landlady and the boarders we had always with us.

The former was a very stout person and otherwise afflicted with Christian science and a weak chest. It did not seem altogether consistent that she should have both, though we did not encourage a discussion of the matter. We were willing that she should have as many things as she could stand up under

if she only wouldn't try to divide them with us.

I am sure now that some of the other boarders must have been discourteous and even harsh with this unfortunate female, and that by contrast we appeared sympathetic and kind. At least, it seemed that she drifted to us by some natural process, and evenings when I wanted to read, or be read to by the Little Woman, she blew in to review the story of her ailments and to expound the philosophy which holds that all the ills of life are but vanity and imagination. Perhaps her ailments *may* have been all imagination and vanity, but they did not seem so to us. They seemed quite real. Indeed they became so deadly real in time that more than once we locked our doors after the Precious Ones were asleep, turned out the gas, and sat

silent and trembling in darkness until the destroying angel should pass by.

I have spoken of the boarders. They too laid their burdens upon us. For what reason I can only conjecture. They brought us their whole stock of complaints—complaints of the landlady, of the table and of each other. Being from the great wide West we may have seemed a bit more broadly human than most of those whose natures had been dwarfed and blighted in the city's narrow soulless round of daily toil. Or it may be all of them had fallen out among themselves before we came. I don't know. I know that a good many of them had, for they told us about it—casually at first, and then in detail.

As an example, we learned from the woman across the hall that

another woman, who occupied the top floor back and painted undesirable water-colors, had been once an artist's model, and that she smoked. From the top floor back, in turn, we discovered that the woman across the way, now a writer of more or less impossible plays, had been formerly a ballet girl and still did a turn now and then to aid in the support of a dissolute and absent husband.

These things made it trying for us. We could not tell which was the more deserving of sympathy. Both seemed to have drawn a pretty poor hand in what was a hard enough game at best. And there were others.

Within the month we were conversant with all the existing feuds as well as those of the past, and with the plots that were being hatched to result in a new brood of

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scandals and counterplots, which were retailed to the Little Woman and subsequently to me. We were a regular clearing-house at last for the wrongs and shortcomings of the whole establishment, and the responsibility of our position weighed us down.

We had never been concerned in intrigue before, and it did not agree with our simple lives. I could feel myself deteriorating, morally and intellectually. I had a desire to beat the Precious Ones (who were certainly well behaved for children shut up in two stuffy rooms) or better still to set the house afire, and run amuck killing and slaying down four flights of stairs—to do something very terrible in fact—something deadly and horrible and final that would put an end forever to this melancholy haunt of Tuesday stews and ghoulish boarders with

the torturing tattle of their everlasting tongues. I shocked the Little Woman daily with words and phrases, used heretofore only under very trying conditions, that had insensibly become the decorations of my ordinary speech.

Clearly something had to be done, and that very soon, if we were to save even the remnants of respectability. We recalled with fondness some of the very discomforts of apartment life and said we would go back to it at any cost.

Our furniture was in storage. We would get it out, and we would begin anew, profiting by our experience. We would go at once, and among other things we would go farther up town. So far down was too noisy, besides the air was not good for the Precious Ones.

It was coming on spring, too, and it would be pleasanter farther up.

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Not so far as we had been before, but far enough to be out of the whirl and clatter and jangle. It was possible, we believed, to strike the happy medium, and this we regarded somewhat in the light of another discovery.

Life now began to assume a new interest. In the few remaining days of our stay in the boarding-house we grew tolerant and even fond of our fellow-boarders, and admitted that an endless succession of Tuesday stews and Wednesday hashes would make us even as they. We went so far as to sympathize heartily with the landlady, who wept and embraced the Little Woman when we went, and gave the Precious Ones some indigestible candy.

We set forth then, happy in the belief that we had mastered, at last, the problem of metropolitan living.



We had tried boarding for a change, and as such it had been a success, but we were altogether ready to take up our stored furniture and find lodgment for it, some place, any place, where the bill of fare was not wholly deductive, where our rooms would not be made a confessional and a scandal bureau, and where we could, in some measure, at least, feel that we had a "home, sweet home."

## VI.

*Pursuing the Ideal.*

I SUPPOSE it was our eagerness for a home that made us so easy to please.

Looking back now after a period of years on the apartment we selected for our ideal nest I am at a loss to recall our reasons for doing so. Innocent though we were, it does not seem to me that we could have found in the brief time devoted to the search so poor a street, so wretched a place, and so disreputable a janitor (this time a man). I only wish to recall that the place was damp and small, with the kitchen in front; that some people across the air shaft were wont to

raise Cain all night long ; that the two men below us frequently attempted to murder each other at unseemly hours, and that some extra matting and furniture stored in the basement were stolen, I suspect, by the janitor himself.

Once more we folded our tents, such of them as we had left, and went far up town—very far, this time. We said that if we had to live up town at all we would go far enough to get a whiff of air from fresh fields.

There was spring in the air when we moved, and far above the Harlem River, where birds sang under blue skies and the south breeze swept into our top-floor windows, we set up our household goods and gods once more. They were getting a bit shaky now, and bruised. The mirrors on sideboard and dresser had never been put on

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twice the same, and the middle leg of the dining-room table wobbled from having been removed so often. But we oiled out the mark and memory of the moving-man, bought new matting, and went into the month of June fresh, clean, and hopeful, with no regret for past errors.

And now at last we found really some degree of comfort. It is true our neighbors were hardly congenial, but they were inoffensive and kindly disposed. The piano on the floor beneath did not furnish pleasing entertainment, but neither was it constant in its efforts to do so. The stairs were long and difficult of ascent, but our distance from the street was gratifying. The business center was far away, but I had learned to improve the time consumed in transit, and our cool eyrie was refreshing after the city heat.

As for the janitor, or janitress, for I do not know in which side of the family the office was existent, he, she, or both were merely lazy, indifferent, and usually invisible. Between them they managed to keep the place fairly clean, and willingly promised anything we asked. It is true they never fulfilled these obligations, but they were always eager to renew them with interest, and on the whole the place was not at all bad.

But the Precious Ones had, by this time, grown fond of change. We were scarcely settled before they began to ask when we were going to move again, and often requested as a favor that we take them out to look at some flats. We overheard them playing "flat-hunting" almost every day, in which game one of them would assume the part of janitor to "show

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through " while the other would be a prospective tenant who surveyed things critically and made characteristic remarks, such as, " How many flights up? " " How much? " " Too small," " Oh, my, kitchen's too dark," " What awful paper," " You don't call that closet a room, I hope," and the like. It seemed a harmless game, and we did not suspect that in a more serious form its fascinations were insidiously rooting themselves in our own lives. It is true we often found ourselves pausing in front of new apartments and wondering what they were like inside, and urged by the Precious Ones entered, now and then, to see and inquire. In fact the Precious Ones really embarrassed us sometimes when, on warm Sunday afternoons, where people were sitting out on the shady steps, they would pause eagerly in front of the sign

"To Let " with : " Oh, papa, look ! Seven rooms and bath ! Oh, mamma, let's go in and see them ! Oh, please, mamma ! Please, papa ! "

At such times we hurried by, oblivious to their importunities, but when the situation was less trying we only too frequently yielded, and each time with less and less reluctance.

It was in the early fall that we moved again,—into a sunny corner flat on a second floor that we strayed into during one of these rambles, and became ensnared by its clean, new attractions. We said that it would be better for winter, and that we were tired of four long flight of stairs. But, alas, by spring everything was out of order from the electric bell at the entrance to the clothes-lines on the roof, while janitors came and went like Punch and Judy figures. Most of the time

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we had none, and some that we had were better dead. So we moved when the birds came back, but it was a mistake, and on the Fourth of July we celebrated by moving again.

We now called ourselves "van-dwellers," the term applied by landlord and agent to those who move systematically and inhabit the moving-man's great trundling house no less than four to six times a year. I am not sure, however, that we ever really earned the title. The true "van-dweller" makes money by moving and getting free rent, while I fear the wear and tear on our chattels more than offset any advantage we ever acquired in this particular direction.

I can think of no reason now for having taken our next flat except that it was different from any of those preceding. Still, it was better



than the summer board we selected from sixty answers to our advertisement, and after eighteen minutes' experience with a sweltering room and an aged and apoplectic dog whose quarters we seemed to have usurped, we came back to it like returning exiles.

It was a long time before we moved again—almost four months. Then the Little Woman strayed into another new house, and was captivated by a series of rooms that ran merrily around a little extension in a manner that allowed the sun to shine into every window.

We had become connoisseurs by this time. We could tell almost the exact shape and price of an apartment from its outside appearance. After one glance inside we could carry the plan mentally for months and reproduce it minutely on paper at will. We had

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learned, too, that it is only by living in many houses in rotation that you can know the varied charms of apartment life. No one flat can provide them all.

The new place had its attractions and we passed a merry Christmas there. Altogether our stay in it was not unpleasant, in spite of the soiled and soulless Teutonic lady below stairs. I think we might have remained longer in this place but for the fact that when spring came once more we were seized with the idea of becoming suburbanites.

We said that a city apartment after all was no place for children, and that a yard of our own, and green fields, must be found. With the numerous quick train services about New York it was altogether possible to get out and in as readily as from almost any point of the upper metropolis, and that, after

all, in the country was the only place to live.

We got nearly one hundred answers to our carefully-worded advertisement for a house, or part of a house, within certain limits, and the one selected was seemingly ideal. Green fields behind it, a railroad station within easy walking distance, grasshoppers singing in the weeds across the road. We strolled, hand in hand with the Precious Ones, over sweet meadows, gathering dandelions and listening to the birds. We had a lawn, too, and sunny windows, and we felt free to do as we chose in any part of our domain, even in the basement, for here there was no janitor.

We rejoiced in our newly-acquired freedom, and praised everything from the warm sunlight that lay in a square on the matting of every room to the rain that splashed

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against the windows and trailed across the waving fields. It is true we had a servant now—Rosa, of whom I shall speak later—but even the responsibility (and it *was* that) of this acquirement did not altogether destroy our happiness. Summer and autumn slipped away. The Precious Ones grew tall and brown, and the old cares and annoyances of apartment life troubled us no more.

But with the rigors and gloom and wretchedness of winter the charms of our suburban home were less apparent. The matter of heat became a serious question, and the memory of steam radiators was a haunting one. More than once the Little Woman was moved to refer to our “cosy little apartment” of the winter before. Also, the railway station seemed farther away through a dark night and a

pouring rain, the fields were gray and sodden, and the grasshoppers across the road were all dead.

We did not admit that we were dissatisfied. In fact, we said so often that we would not go back to the city to live that no one could possibly suspect our even considering such a thing.

However, we went in that direction one morning when we set out for a car ride, and as we passed the new apartment houses of Washington Heights we found ourselves regarding them with something of the old-time interest. Of course there was nothing personal in this interest. It was purely professional, so to speak, and we assured each other repeatedly that even the best apartment (we had prospered somewhat in the world's goods by this time and we no longer spoke of "flats")—that even the best "apart-

ment, then, was only an apartment" after all, which is true, when you come to think of it.

Still, there certainly were attractive new houses, and among them appeared to be some of a different pattern from any in our "collection." One in particular attracted us, and a blockade of cars ahead just then gave us time to observe it more closely.

There were ornamental iron gates at the front entrance, and there was a spot of shells and pebbles next the pavement—almost a touch of seashore, and altogether different from the cheerless welcome of most apartment houses. Then, of course, the street car passing right by the door would be convenient——

The blockade ahead showed no sign of opening that we could see. By silent but common consent we

rose and left the car. Past the little plot of sea beach, through the fancy iron gates, up to the scarcely finished, daintily decorated, latest improved apartment we went, conducted by a dignified, newly-uniformed colored janitor, who quoted prices and inducements.

I looked at the Little Woman—she looked at me. Each saw that the other was thinking of the long, hard walk from the station on dark, wet nights, the dead grasshoppers, and the gray, gloomy fields. We were both silent all the way home, remembering the iron gates, the clean janitor, the spot of shells, and a beautiful palm that stood in the vestibule. We were both silent and we were thinking, but we did not move until nearly a week later.

## VII.

*Household Retainers.*

IT is of Rosa that I would speak now, Rosa, the young and consuming; and of Wilhelmine, the reformer.

Rosa came first in our affections. It was during our first period of suburban residence that she became a part of our domestic economy, though on second thought economy seems hardly the word. She was tall, and, while you could never have guessed it to look into her winsome, gentle face, I am sure that she was hollow all the way down.

When I first gazed upon her I



wondered why one so young (she was barely sixteen), and with such delicacy of feature, should have been given feet so disproportionate in size. I know now that they were mere recesses, and that it was my fate for the time being to fill, or to try to fill, them.

She came in the afternoon, and when, after a portion of the roast had been devoted to the Precious Ones and their forbears, and an allotment of the pudding had been issued and dallied over, Rosa came on and literally demolished on a dead run every hope of to-morrow's stew, or hash, or a "between-meal" for the Precious Ones—licked not only the platter, but the vegetable dishes, the gravy tureen, the bread board, and the pudding pan, clean, so to speak.

At first we merely smiled indulgently and said: "Poor thing, she

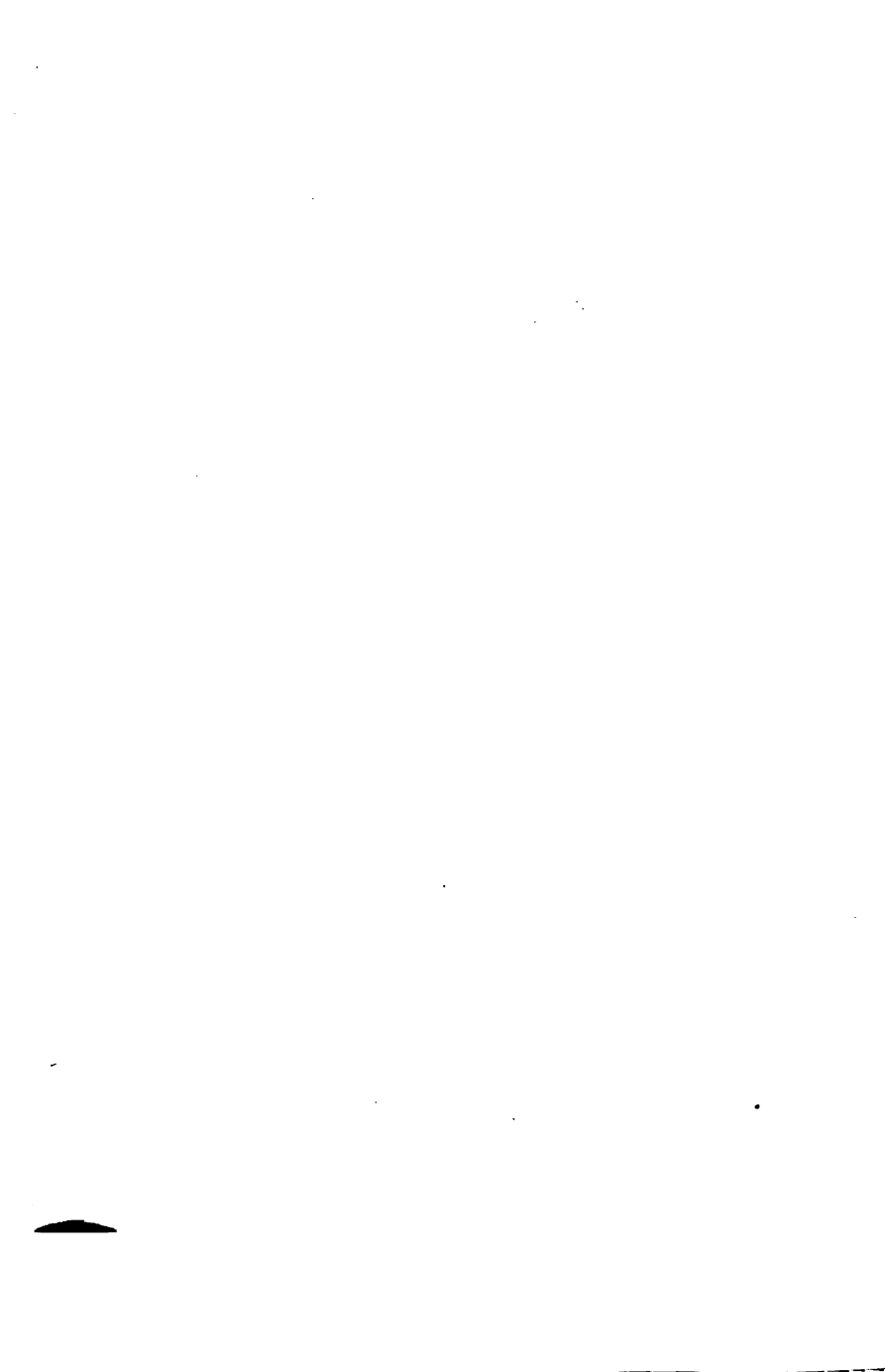
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is half starved, and it is a pleasure to have her enjoy a good meal. She can't keep it up, of course."

But this was simply bad judgment. At daybreak I hastened out for a new invoice of bread stuff and market supplies in order to provide for immediate wants. Rosa had rested well and was equal to the occasion. When I returned in the evening I found that our larder had been replenished and wrecked twice during my absence. The Little Woman had a driven, hunted look in her face, while Rosa was as winsome and gentle-featured, as sweet and placid in her consciousness of well being and doing, as a cathedral saint. In fact, it always seemed to me that she never looked so like a madonna as she did immediately after destroying the better part of a two-dollar roast and such other trifles as chanced to be within reach



"ROSA"



in the hour of her strong requirements.

And these things she could do seven days in the week and as many times during each twenty-four hours as opportunity yielded to her purpose. We were hopeful for days that it was only a temporary disaster, and that we would eventually get her filled up, shoes and all.

But days became weeks and weeks gathered themselves into months. Each morning Rosa came up winsome and glad to be alive—fresh as the dew on the currant bushes and ravenous as a Mohammedan at the end of Ramadan.

It was no use. We gave it up at last, and merely concerned ourselves with getting sufficient unto the day and moment.

But there was another side to

Rosa. She was willing to take counsel, in the matter of her labors, and profit by it. Also she had no particular aversion to work, and she was beloved of the Precious Ones. It is true she had no special regard for the fragility of queensware, but care in these matters is not expected even of old retainers ; while Rosa, as I have said, was in the flower of youth.

It was not without regret, therefore, that we found she could not accompany us to the city. Her people did not wish her to become a part of the great metropolis in early youth, and were willing to do the best they could with her appetite at home until another near-by source of supplies could be found. So it was that Rosa passed out of our fortunes when we gave up suburban life and became dwellers in the Monte Cristo apartments.

It was then that Wilhelmine came. The Little Woman's brother Tom was to abide with us for a season, and it seemed necessary to have somebody. I suggested that any employment bureau could doubtless supply us with just what we needed, and the Little Woman went down to see.

I have never known exactly what her experiences were there, though she has done her best to tell me. Her account lacked lucidity and connection, but from what I can gather piecemeal, she did not enjoy herself.

However, the experiment resulted in something—a very old German individual in a short dress, stout of person, and no English worth mentioning. She came on us like a cyclone, and her speech was as a spring torrent in volume. I happened to know one or two Ger-

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man words, and when incautiously I chanced to let her have a look at them she seized my hand and did a skirt dance. Then presently she ran out into the kitchen, took everything from every shelf, and rearranged the articles in a manner adapted to the uses of nothing human.

This was the beginning, and relentlessly she pursued her course, backed up by a lifetime of experience, and the strong German traditions of centuries.

The entire household was reorganized under her régime. The Little Woman and the Precious Ones were firmly directed, and I was daily called to account in a mixture of high-g geared German and splintered English that was fairly amazing in its quantity.

Nothing was so trivial as to escape Wilhelmine. Like all great



generals, she regarded even the minutest details as important, and I was handled with no less severity for cutting an extra slice of bread than for investing in a new rug for the front room. For, let it be said now, Wilhelmine was economical and abhorred waste. Neither did she break the crockery, and, unlike Rosa, she did not eat. She was no longer young and growing, and the necessity of coaling-up every hour or two seemed to have gone by.

But, alas! we would have preferred beautiful, young, careless, larder-wrecking Rosa to Wilhelmine, the reformer. We would have welcomed her with joy, and surreptitiously in whispers we hatched plots to rid ourselves of the tyrant. Once I even went so far as to rebel and battle with her in the very sanctity of the kitchen itself.

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Not that Wilhelmine could not cook. In her own German cabbage-and-onion way she was resourceful, and the house reeked with her combinations until strong men shed tears, and even the janitor hurried by our door with bowed head. I never questioned her ability to cook, but in the matter of coffee she was hopeless. In the best German I could muster I told her so. I told her so several times, so that it could sink in. I said it over forward and backward and sideways, in order to get the verbs right, and when she was through denouncing me I said that I would give her an object lesson in making coffee in a French pot.

I am sure now that this was a mistake—that German blood could stand almost anything in the world better than a French coffeepot, but at the time I did not recall

the affairs and animosities of nations.

I had other things to think of. I was employed in the delicate operation of extracting amber nectar by a tedious dripping process, and simultaneously engaging with a rapid-fire German at short range. I understood very little of what she said, and what I did gather was not complimentary. I fired a volley or two at last myself, and then retreated in good order bearing the coffee-pot.

The coffee was a success, but it was obtained at too great a risk. That night we wrote to Rosa and to her mother. We got no reply, and, after days of anxious waiting, the Little Woman went out to discuss the situation in person. But the family had moved, and there had been a very heavy snow. The Little Woman waded about nearly

all day in pursuit of the new address. She learned it at last, but it was too late then to go any farther, so she came home and wrote again, only to get no reply. Then I tried my hand in the matter as follows:—

LINES TO ROSA IN ABSENCE.

Lady Rosa Vere de Smith,  
Leave your kin and leave your kith;  
Life without you is a mockery;  
Come once more and mend our crockery.

Lady Rosa Vere de Smith,  
Life for us has lost its pith;  
You taught us how to prize you thus,  
And now you will not bide with us.

Lady Rosa Vere de Smith,  
Have we no voice to reach you with?  
Come once more and wreck our larder;  
We will welcome you with ardor.

I could have written more of this, perhaps, and I still believe it would have proved effective, but when I

read aloud as far as written, the Little Woman announced that she would rather do without Rosa forever than to let a thing like that go through the mails. So it was suppressed, and Rosa was lost to us, I fear, for all time.

But Providence had not entirely forgotten us, though its ways as usual were inscrutable. Wilhelmine, it seems, locked herself nightly in her room, and the locks being noiseless in the Monte Cristo apartments she could not realize when the key turned that she was really safely barred in. Hence it seems she continued to twist at the key which, being of a slender pattern, was one night wrenched apart and Wilhelmine, alas! was only too surely fortified in her stronghold. When she realized this she, of course, became wildly vociferous.

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I heard the outburst and hastening back found her declaring that she was lost without a doubt. That the house would certainly catch fire before she was released and that she would be burned like a rat in a trap.

I called to her reassuringly, but it did no good. Then I climbed up on a chair set on top of a table, and observed her over the transom. She had her wardrobe tied in a bundle all ready for the fire which she assured me was certain to come, though how she hoped to get her wardrobe out when she could not get herself out, or of what use it would be to her afterwards was not clear.

It was useless to persuade her to go to bed and let me get a locksmith in the morning. I was convinced that she would carry-on all night like a forgotten *dachshund*,

unless she was released. It was too late to find a locksmith and I did not wish to take the janitor into the situation.

I got a screw-driver and handed it over to her telling her to unscrew the lock. But by this time she had reached a state where she did not know one end of the implement from another. She merely looked at it helplessly and continued to leap about and bewail her fate loudly and in mixed tongues.

I saw at last that I must climb over the transom. It was small, and I am a large man. I looked at the size of it and then considered my height and shoulder measure. Then I made the effort.

I could not go through feet first, and to go through a transom head first is neither dignified or exhilarating. When I was something more than half through I pawed about

in the air head down in a vain effort to reach a little chiffonier in Wilhelmine's room.

She watched me with interest to see how near I could come to it, and by some mental process it dawned upon her at last that she could help matters by pushing it toward me. Having reached this conclusion the rest was easy, for she was as strong as an ox and swung the furniture toward me like a toy.

Five minutes later I had unscrewed the lock and Wilhelmine was free. So were we, for when I threw the lock into a drawer with a few choice German remarks which I had been practising for just such an emergency, Wilhelmine seized upon her bundles, already packed, and, vowing that she would abide in no place where she could not lie down in the security of strong and hard twisting keys, she disappeared,



strewing the stairway with German verbs and expletives in her departure.

We saw her no more, and in two weeks, by constant airing, we had our culinary memories of her reduced to such a degree that the flat on the floor above found a tenant, and carbolic acid was no longer needed in the halls.

## VIII.

*Inheritance and Mania.*

AND now came one of these episodes which sometimes disturb the sequestered quiet of even the best regulated and most conventional of households. We were notified one day that my Aunt Jane, whom I believe I have not before mentioned, having properly arranged her affairs had passed serenely out of life at an age and in a manner that left nothing to be desired.

I was sorry, of course,—as sorry as it was possible to be, considering the fact that she had left me a Sum which though not large was absurdly welcome. I did not sleep

very well until it came, fearing there might be some hitch in administrating the will, but there was no hitch (my Aunt Jane, heaven rest her spirit, had been too thoroughly business for that) and the Sum came along in due season.

We would keep this Sum, we decided, as a sinking fund; something to have in the savings bank, to be added to, from time to time, as a provision for the future and our Precious Ones. This seemed a good idea at the time, and it seems so yet, for that matter. I have never been able to discover that there is anything wrong with having money in a good savings bank.

I *put* the Sum in a good savings bank, and we were briefly satisfied with our prudence. It gave us a sort of safe feeling to know that it was there, to be had almost instantly, in case of need.

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It was this latter knowledge that destroyed us. When the novelty of feeling safe had worn off we began to need the Sum. Casually at first, coming as a mere suggestion, in fact, from one or the other of us, of what we could buy with it. It is wonderful how many things we were constantly seeing that the Sum would pay for.

Our furniture, for instance, had grown old without becoming antique, and was costly only when you reckon what we had paid for moving it. We had gradually acquired a taste (or it may have been only the need of a taste) for the real thing. Whatever it was it seemed expensive—too expensive to be gratified heretofore, but now that we had the Sum——

The shops along Fourth Avenue were literally bulging with things that we coveted and that the Sum

would pay for. I looked at them wistfully in passing, still passing strong in my resolution to let the Sum lie untouched. Then I began to linger and go in, and to imagine that I knew a good piece and a bargain when I saw it. This last may be set down as a fatal symptom. It led me into vile second-hand stores in the hope of finding some hitherto undiscovered treasure. In these I hauled over the wretched jetsam of a thousand cheap apartments and came out dusty and contaminated but not discouraged.

I suggested to the Little Woman one day that it would be in the nature of an investment to buy now, in something old and good, the desk I had needed so long. I assured her that antiques were becoming scarcer each year, and that pieces bought to-day were quite as good as money in the savings bank,

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besides having the use of them. The Little Woman agreed readily. For a long time she had wanted me to have a desk, and my argument in favor of an antique piece seemed sound.

I did not immediately find a desk that suited me. There were a great many of them, and most of them seemed sufficiently antique, but being still somewhat modern in my ideas I did not altogether agree with their internal arrangements, while such as did appeal would have made too large an incursion into the Sum. What I did find at length was a table—a mahogany veneered table which the dealer said was of a period before the war. I could readily believe it. If he had said that it had been *through* the war I could have believed that, too. It looked it. But I saw in it possibilities, and re-

flected that it would give me an opportunity to develop a certain mechanical turn which had lain dormant hitherto. The Little Woman had been generous in the matter of the desk. I would buy the table for the Little Woman.

She was pleased, of course, but seemed to me she regarded it a trifle doubtfully when it came in. Still, the price had not been great, and it was astonishing to see how much better it looked when I was through with it, and it was in a dim corner, with its more unfortunate portions next the wall. Indeed, it had about it quite an air of genuine respectability, and made the rest of our things seem poor and trifling. It was the beginning of the end.

Some Colonial chairs came next.

The Little Woman and I discovered their battered skeletons

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one day as we were hurrying to catch a car. They were piled in front of a place that under ordinary conditions we would have shunned as a pest-house. Still the chairs were really beautiful and it was a genuine "find"! I did not restore these myself—they needed too much. I had them delivered to a cabinet-maker who in turn delivered them to us in a condition that made the rest of our belongings look even shabbier, and at a cost that made another incursion into the Sum.

I renovated and upholstered the next lot of chairs myself, and was proud of the result, though the work was attended by certain unpleasant features, and required time. On the whole, I concluded to let the cabinet-maker undertake the heavy lounge that came next, and was in pieces, as if a cyclone



had struck it somewhere back in the forties and it had been lying in a heap, ever since. It was wonderful what he did with it. It came to us a thing of beauty and an everlasting joy, and his bill made a definite perforation in the Sum.

We did not mind so much now. It was merely altering the form of our investment, we said, and we had determined to become respectable at any cost. The fact that we had been offered more for the restored lounge than it cost us reassured us in our position. Most of our old traps we huddled together one day, and disposed of them to a second-hand man for almost enough to pay for one decent piece—a chiffonier this time—and voted a good riddance to bad rubbish.

Reflecting upon this now, it seems to me we were a bit hasty

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and unkind. Poor though they were, the old things had served us well and gone with us through the ups and downs of many apartments. In some of them we had rocked the Precious Ones, and on most of them the precious Ones had tried the strength and resistance of their toys. They were racked and battered, it is true and not always to be trusted as to stability, but we knew them and their shortcomings, and they knew us and ours. We knew just how to get them up winding stairs and through narrow doors. They knew about the length of time between each migration, and just about what to expect with each stage of our Progress. They must have long foreseen the end. Let us hope they will one day become "antiques" and fall into fonder and more faithful hands.

But again I am digressing—it is my usual fault. We invested presently in a Chippendale side-board, and a tall clock which gave me no peace night or day until I heard its mellow tick and strike in our own dim little hall. The aperture in the Sum was now plainly visible, and by the time we had added the desk, which I had felt unable to afford at the start, and a chair to match, it had become an orifice that widened to a gap, with the still further addition of a small but not inexpensive Chippendale cabinet and something to put within it.

The Little Woman called a halt now. She said she thought we had enough invested in this particular direction, that it was not wise to put all one's eggs into one basket. Besides, we had all the things our place would hold com-

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fortably: rather more, in fact, except in the matter of rugs. The floors of the Sunshine apartment were hard finished and shellacked. Such rugs as we had were rare only as to numbers, and we were no longer proud of them. I quite agreed with the Little Woman on the question of furniture, but I said that now we had such good things in that line, I would invest in one really good rug.

I did. I drifted one day into an Armenian place on Broadway into which the looms of the Orient had poured a lavish store. Small black-haired men issued from among the heaped-up wares like mice in a granary. I was surrounded—I was beseeched and entreated—I was made to sit down while piece after piece of antiquity and art were unrolled at my feet. At each unrolling the tallest of

the black men would spread his hands and look at me.

"A painting, a painting, a masterpiece. I never have such fine piece since I begin business;" and each of the other small black men would spread their hands and look at me and murmur low, reverent exclamations.

I did not buy the first time. You must know that even when one has become inured to the tariff on antique furniture, and has still the remains of a Sum to draw upon, there is something about the prices of oriental rugs that is discouraging when one has never given the matter much previous thought.

But the memory of those unrolled masterpieces haunted me. There was something fascinating and Eastern and fine about sitting in state as it were, and having the

treasures of the Orient spread before you by those little dark men.

So I went again, and this time I made the first downward step. It was a Cashmere—a thick, mellow antique piece with a purple bloom pervading it, and a narrow faded strip at one end that betokened exposure and age. The Little Woman gasped when she saw it, and the Precious Ones approved it in chorus. It took me more than a week to confess the full price. It had to be done by stages; for of course the Little Woman had not sat as I had sat and had the “paintings of the East” unrolled at her feet and thus grown accustomed to magnificence. To tell her all at once that our one new possession had cost about five times as much as all the rest of our rugs put together would have been an

unnecessary rashness on my part. As it was, she came to it by degrees, and by degrees also she realized that our other floor coverings were poor, base, and spurious.

Still I was prudent in my next selections. I bought two smaller pieces, a Kazak strip, and a Beloochistan mat. This was really all we needed, but a few days later a small piece of antique Bokhara overpowered me, and I fell. I said it would be nice on the wall, and the Little Woman confessed that it was, but again insisted that we would better stop now. She little realized my condition. The small dark men in their dim-lit Broadway cave had woven a spell about me that made the seductions of antique furniture as a forgotten tale.

I bought a book on rug collecting, and I could not pass their treasure-house without turning in.

They had learned to know me from afar, and the sound of my step was the signal for a horde of them to come tumbling out from among the rugs.

It was the old story of Eastern magic. The spell of the Orient was upon me, and in the language of my friends I went plunging down the *rugged* path to ruin. I added an Anatolian to my collections—a small one that I could slip into the house without the Little Woman seeing it until it was placed and in position to help me in my defense. It was the same with a Bergama and a Coula, but by this time the Precious Ones would come tearing out into the hall when I came home and then rush back, calling as they ran: “Oh, mamma, he’s got one and he’s holding it behind him! He’s got another rug, mamma!”



So when I got the big Khiva I felt that some new tactics must be adopted. In the first place, it would take two strong men to carry it, and in the next place it would cover the parlor floor completely, and meant the transferring to the walls of several former purchases.

Further than this, its addition would make the hole in the Sum big enough to drive a wagon through—a band-wagon at that with a whole circus procession behind it. Indeed, the remains of the Sum would be merely fragmentary, so to speak, and only the glad Christmas season could make it possible for me to confess and justify to the Little Woman the fulness of the situation.

Luckily, Christmas was not far distant. The dark men agreed to hold the big Khiva until the day

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before, and then deliver it to the janitor. With the janitor's help I could get it up and into the apartment after the Little Woman had gone to bed. I could spread it down at my leisure and decorate the walls with some of those now on the floor. When on the glad Christmas morning this would burst upon the Little Woman in sudden splendor, I felt that she would not be too severe in her judgment.

It was a good plan, and it worked as well as most plans do. There were some hitches, of course. The Little Woman, for instance, was not yet in bed when the janitor was ready to help me, and I was in mortal terror lest she should hear us getting the big roll into the hallway, or coming out later should stumble over it in the dark. But she did not seem to hear, and she

did not venture out into the hall. Neither did she seem to notice anything unusual when by and by I stumbled over it myself and plunged through a large pasteboard box in which there was something else for the Little Woman—something likely to make her still more lenient in the matter of the rug. I made enough noise to arouse the people in the next flat, but the Little Woman can be very discreet on Christmas eve.

She slept well the next morning, too,—a morning I shall long remember. If you have never attempted to lay a ten-by-twelve Khiva rug in a small flat-parlor, under couches and tables and things, and with an extra supply of steam going, you do not understand what one can undergo for the sake of art. It's a fairly interesting job for three people—two

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to lift the furniture and one to spread the rug, and even then it isn't easy to find a place to stand on. It was about four o'clock I think when I began, and the memory of the next three hours is weird, and lacking in Christmas spirit. I know now just how every piece of furniture we possess looks from the under side. I suppose this isn't a bad sort of knowledge to have, but I would rather not acquire it while I am pulling the wrinkles out of a two-hundred-pound rug. But when the Little Woman looked at the result and at me she was even more kind than I had expected. She did not denounce me. She couldn't. Looking me over carefully she realized dimly what the effort had cost, and pitied me. It was a happy Christmas, altogether, and in the afternoon, looking at our possessions,

the Little Woman remarked that we needed a house now to display them properly. It was a chance remark but it bore fruit.

## IX.

*Gilded Affluence.*

YET not immediately. We had still to make the final step of our Progress in apartment life, and to acquire other valuable experience. It happened in this wise.

Of the Sum there still remained a fragment—unimportant and fragile, it would seem—but quite sufficient, as it proved, to make our lives reasonably exciting for several months.

A friend on the Stock Exchange whispered to me one morning that there was to be a big jump in Calfskin Common—something phenomenal, he said, and that a hun-

dred shares would pay a profit directly that would resemble money picked up in the highway.

I had never dealt in stocks, or discovered any currency in the public thoroughfares, but my recent inheritance of the Sum and its benefits had developed a taste in the right direction. Calfskin Common was low then, almost as low as it has been since, and an option on a hundred shares could be secured with a ridiculously small amount—even the fragment of the Sum would be sufficient.

I mentioned the matter that night to the Little Woman. We agreed almost instantly that there was no reason why we should not make something on Calfskin Common, though I could see that the Little Woman did not know what Calfskin Common was. I have hinted before that she was not then

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conversant with the life and lingo of the Stock Exchange, and on the whole my advantage in this direction was less than it seemed at the time. I think we both imagined that Calfskin Common had something to do with a low grade of hides, and the Little Woman said she supposed there must be a prospective demand from some foreign country that would advance the price of cheap shoes. Of course it would be nice to have our investments profitable, but on the whole perhaps I'd better lay in an extra pair or so of everyday footwear for the Precious Ones.

I acquired some information along with my option on the stock next day, so that both the Little Woman and myself could converse quite technically by bed-time. We knew that we had "put up a ten per cent. margin" and had an "op-



tion " at twelve dollars a share on a hundred shares of the common stock in leather corporation—said stock being certain to go to fifty and perhaps a hundred dollars a share within the next sixty days. The fragment of the Sum and a trifle more had been exchanged for the Stock, and we were "in on a deal." Then too we had a "stop-loss" on the Stock so that we were safe, whatever happened.

The Little Woman didn't understand the "stop-loss" at first, and when I explained to her that it worked automatically, as it were, she became even more mystified. I gathered from her remarks that she thought it meant something like an automatic water shut-off such as we had in the bath-room to prevent waste. Of course, that was altogether wrong, and I knew it at the time, but it did not seem worth

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while to explain in detail. I merely said that it was something we could keep setting higher as the stock advanced, so that in event of a downward turn we would save our original sum, with the accrued profits.

Then we talked about what we would do with the money. We said that now we had such a lot of good things and were going to make money out of the Stock we ought to try one really high-class apartment—something with an elevator, and an air of refinement and gentility. It would cost a good deal, of course, but the surroundings would be so much more congenial, so much better for the Precious Ones, and now that I was really doing fairly well, and that we had the Stock—still we would be prudent and not move hastily.

We allowed the Stock to advance

five points before we really began to look for a place. Five points advance meant five hundred dollars' profit on our investment, and my friend on the exchange laughed and congratulated me and said it was only the beginning. So we put up the stop-loss, almost as far as it would go, and began to look about for a place that was quite suitable for people with refined taste, some very good things in the way of rugs and furniture, and a Stock.

We were not proud as yet. We merely felt prosperous and were willing to let fortune smile on us amid the proper surroundings. We said it was easy enough to make money, now that we knew how, and that it was no wonder there were so many rich people in the metropolis. We had fought the hard fight, and were willing now to

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take it somewhat easier. We selected an apartment with these things in view.

It was some difficulty to find a place that suited both us and the Precious Ones. Not that they were hard to please—they welcomed anything in the nature of change—but at most of the fine places children were rigorously barred, a rule, it seemed to us, that might result in rather trying complications between landlord and tenant in the course of time and nature, though we did not pursue investigations in this line. We found lodgment and welcome at length in the Apollo, a newly constructed apartment of the latest pattern and in what seemed a most desirable neighborhood.

The Apollo was really a very imposing and towering affair, with onyx and gilded halls. The elevator that fairly shot us skyward

when we ascended to our eerie nest ten stories above the street, and was a boundless joy to the Precious Ones, who would gladly have made their playhouse in the gaudy little car with the brown boy in blue and brass. Our fine belongings looked grand in the new suite, and our rugs on the inlaid and polished floor were luxurious and elegant. Compared with this, much of our past seemed squalid and a period to be forgotten. Ann, our maid, still with us, put on a white cap and apron at meal-times, and to answer the bell, though the cap had a habit of getting over one ear, while the apron remained white with difficulty.

The janitor of the Apollo was quite as imposing as the house itself,—a fallen nobleman, in fact, though by no means fallen so far as most of those whose possibilities

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of decline had been immeasurably less. He was stately and uplifting in his demeanor. So much so that I found myself unconsciously imitating his high-born manner and mode of speech. I had a feeling that he was altogether more at home in the place than we were, but I hoped this would pass. Whatever the cost, we were determined to live up to the Apollo and its titled *Chargé d'Affaires*.

And now came exciting days. The Stock continued to advance, as our friend had prophesied. Some days it went up one point, some days two. Every point meant a hundred dollars' clear profit. One day it advanced five full points. We only counted full points. Fractional advances we threw into the next day's good measure, and set the stop-loss higher, and yet ever higher.

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We acquired credit with ourselves. We began to think that perhaps after all we hadn't taken quite so good an apartment as we deserved. What was a matter of a thousand dollars more or less on a year's rent when the Stock was yielding a profit of a hundred or two dollars a day. We repeated that it was easy enough now to understand how New Yorkers got rich, and could afford the luxuries heretofore regarded by us with a wonderment that was akin to awe. I began to have a vague notion of abandoning other pursuits and going into stocks, altogether. We even talked of owning our own home on Fifth Avenue. Still we were quite prudent, as was our custom. I did not go definitely into stocks, and we remained with the fallen nobleman in the Apollo. Neither did we actually

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negotiate for Fifth Avenue property.

The Little Woman bought many papers during the day. In some of them early stock quotations were printed in red, so it might be truly said that these were red-letter days for the Little Woman. When she heard "*Extra!*" being shouted in the street far below she could not dispossess herself of the idea that it had been issued to announce a sensational advance of the Stock. Even as late as ten o'clock one night she insisted on my going down for one, though I explained that the Stock Exchange had closed some seven hours before. The Precious Ones fairly kept the elevator busy during the afternoon, going for extras, and when the final Wall Street edition was secured they would come shouting in,

"Here it is. Look at the Stock,



quick, Mamma, and see how much we've made to-day!"

Truly this was a gilded age; though I confess that it did not seem quite real, and looking back now the memory of it seems less pleasant than that of some of the very hard epochs that had gone before. Still, it occupies a place all its own and is not without value in life's completed scheme.

The Stock did not go to fifty. It limped before it got to forty, and we began to be harassed by paltry fractional advances, with even an occasional fractional decline. We did not approve of this. It was annoying to look in the Wall Street edition and find that we had made only twelve dollars and a half, instead of a hundred or two, as had been the case in the beginning. We even thought of selling Calfskin Common and buying

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a stock that would not act that way; but my friend of the exchange advised against it. He said this was merely a temporary thing, and that fifty and a hundred would come along in good time. He adjusted the stop-loss for us so that there was no danger of the Stock being sold on a temporary decline, and we sat down to wait and watch the papers while the Stock gathered strength for a new upward rush that was sure to come, and would place us in a position to gratify a good many of the ambitions lately formed.

A feverish and nerve-destroying ten days followed. The Stock had become to us as a personal Presence that we watched as it stumbled and struggled and panted, and dug its common Calfskin toes into things in a frantic effort to scale the market. I know now that the men

who had organized the deal were boasting and shouting, and beating the air in their wild encouragement, while those who opposed it were hammering, and throttling and flinging mud, in as wild an effort to check and demoralize and destroy. At the time, however, we caught only the echo of these things, and believed as did our friend on the exchange, that a great capitalist was in control of Calfskin Common and would send it to par.

Only we wished he would send it faster. We did not like to fool along this way, an eighth up and an eighth, or a quarter down, and all uncertainty and tension. Besides, we needed our accruing profits to meet our heavily increased expenses which were by no means easy to dispose of with our normal income, improved though it was with time and tireless effort.

Indeed, most of the eighths and quarters presently seemed to be in the wrong direction. It was no fun to lose even twelve dollars and a half a day and keep it up. The Presence in the household was in delicate health. It needed to be coddled and pampered, and the strain of it told on us. The Little Woman developed an anxious look, and grew nervous and feverish at the clamor of an "extra." Sometimes I heard her talking "plus" and "minus" and "points" in her sleep and knew that she had taken the Stock to bed with her.

The memory of our old quiet life in the Sunshine and Monte Christo began to grow in sweetness beside this sordid and gilded existence in the Apollo. The massive portals and towering masonry which at first had been as

a solid foundation for genuine respectability began to seem gloomy and overpowering, and lacking in the true home spirit we had found elsewhere. The smartly dressed and mannered people who rode up and down with us on the elevator did not seem quite genuine, and their complexions were not always real. It may have been the condition of the Stock that disheartened us and made their lives as well as ours seem artificial. I don't know. I only know that I began to have a dim feeling that we would have been happier if we had been satisfied with our oriental rugs and antique furniture, and the remnant of the Sum, without the acquaintance of the Stock and the fallen nobleman below stairs. But, as I have said, all things have their place and value, I suppose, and our regrets, if they were that, have

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long since been dissipated, with the things that made them possible.

Quickly, as they had come, they passed and were not. I was working busily one morning in my south front study when the Little Woman entered hurriedly. It was late April and our windows were open, but being much engaged I had not noticed the cries of "extra!" that floated up from the street below. It was these that had brought the Little Woman, however, and she leaned out to look and listen.

"They are calling out something about stocks and Wall Street," she said, "I am sure of it. Go down and see, quick! Calfskin Common must have gone to a hundred!"

"Oh, pshaw!" I laughed, "it's only the assassination of a king, or something. You're excited and don't hear right."

Still, I did go down, and I fumed at the elevator-boy for being so slow to answer, though I suppose he was prompt enough. The "extra" callers had passed by the time I got to the street, but I chased and caught them. Then I ran all the way back to the Apollo, and plunged into the elevator that was just starting heavenward.

I suppose I looked pretty white when I rushed in where the Little Woman was waiting. But the type that told the dreadful tale was red enough, in all conscience. There it was, in daubed vermilion, for the whole world and the Little Woman to see.

#### "PANIC ON WALL STREET.

"Break in Leather stocks causes general decline. Calfskin Common falls twenty points in ten min-

utes. Three failures and more to come!"

Following this was a brief list of the most sensational drops and the names of the failing firms. For a moment we stared at each other, speechless. Then the Little Woman recovered voice.

"Oh," she gasped, "we've caused a panic!"

"No," I panted, "but we're in one!"

"And we'll lose everything! People always do in panics, don't they?"

I nodded gloomily.

"A good many do. That is, unless——"

"But the stop-loss!" she remembered joyfully, "we've got a stop-loss!"

"That's so!" I assented, "the stop-loss! Our stock is already



sold—that is—if—the stop-loss worked.”

“But you know you said it worked automatically.”

“So it does—automatically, if—if it holds! It must have worked! I’ll telephone at once, and see.”

There was a telephone in the Apollo and I hurried to it. Five women and three men were waiting ahead of me, and every one tried to telephone about stocks. Some got replies and became hysterical. One elderly woman with a juvenile make-up and a great many rings fainted and was borne away unconscious. A good many got nothing whatever.

I was one of the latter. The line to my brokers was busy. It was busy all that day, during which we bought extras and suffered. By nightfall we would have rejoiced to know that even the original frag-

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ment of the Sum had been saved out of the general wreck of things on the Street.

It was. Even a little more, for the stop-loss that had failed to hold against the first sudden and overwhelming pressure, had caught somewhere about twenty, and our brokers next morning advised us of the sale.

It was a quiet breakfast that we had. We were rather mixed as to our feelings, but I know now that a sense of relief was what we felt most. It was all over—the tension of anxious days, and the restless nights. Many had been ruined utterly. We had saved something out of the wreck—enough to pay the difference in our rent. Then, too, we were alive and well, and we had our Precious Ones. Also our furniture, which was both satisfactory and paid for. Through

the open windows the sweet spring air was blowing in, bringing a breath and memory of country lanes. Even before breakfast was over I reminded the Little woman of what she had once said about needing a home of our own, now that we had things to put in it. I said that the memory of our one brief suburban experience was like a dream of sunlit and perfumed fields. That we had run the whole gamut of apartment life and the Apollo had been the post-graduate course. In some ways it was better than the others, and if we chose to pinch and economize in other ways, as many did, we still might manage to pay for its luxury, but after all it was not, and never had been a home to me, while the ground and the Precious Ones were too far apart for health.

And the Little Woman, God bless

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her, agreed instantly and heartily, and declared that we would go. Onyx and gilded elegance she said were obtained at too great a price for people with simple tastes and moderate incomes. As for stocks, we agreed that they were altogether in keeping with our present surroundings—with the onyx and the gilt—with the fallen nobleman below stairs and those who were fallen and not noble, the artificial aristocrats, who rode up and down with us on the elevator. We had had quite enough of it all. We had taken our apartment for a year, but as the place was already full, with tenants waiting, there would be no trouble to sublet to some one of the many who are ever willing to spend most of their income in rent and live the best way they can. Peace be with them. They are welcome to do so,

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but for people like ourselves the Apollo was not built, and *Vanitas Vanitatum* is written upon its walls.

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We began reading advertisements at once and took jaunts to "see property." The various investment companies supplied free transportation on these occasions. It was a pleasant variation from the old days of flat hunting. The Precious Ones, who remembered with joy our former brief suburban experiment, appreciated it, and raced shouting through rows of new "instalment houses" with nice lawns, all within the commutation limits. We settled on one, at last, through an agency which the trolley-man referred to as the "Reality Trust."

The cash-payment was small and the instalments, if long continued, were at least not discouraging as to size. We had a nice wide lawn with green grass, a big, dry cellar with a furnace, a high, light garret, and eight beautiful light rooms, all our own. At the back there were clothes-poles and room for a garden. In front there was a long porch with a place for a hammock. There was room in the yard for the Precious Ones to romp, as well as space to spread out our rugs. We closed the bargain at once, and engaged a moving man. Our Flat days were over.

And now fortune seemed all at once to smile. The day of our last move was perfect. The moving man came exactly on time and delivered our possessions at the new home on the moment of



"OUR GARDEN FLOURISHED"

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our arrival there. The Little Woman superintended matters inside, while I spread out my rugs on the grass in the sun and shook them and swept them and scolded the Precious Ones, who were inclined to sit on the one I was handling, to my heart's content. Within an hour the butcher, the baker, and the merry milk-maker had called and established relations. By night-fall we were fairly settled—our furniture, so crowded in a little city apartment, airily scattered through our eight big, beautiful rooms, and our rugs, all fresh and clean, reaching as far as they would go, suggesting new additions to our collection whenever the spell of the dark-faced Armenians in their dim oriental Broadway recess should assert itself during the years to come.



**PART II**  
**THE COMMUTERS**



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# THE COMMUTERS

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## X.

### *A Garden of Dreams.*

OUR first summer in the suburbs was preparatory.

After four years of "flat life" we were not overparticular, and were inclined to be pleased with things as we found them. The air was balm; the beneficent quiet an anodyne for all human ills. We praised indiscriminately whatever came to hand, and were in no mood to criticize, remodel, or improve.

As for the Precious Ones, they romped and rejoiced, and found

fault with nothing but their meal-times, which they thought should come oftener, and with their bed-times, which they thought should not come at all. Watching them grow brown and hearty, the Little Woman and I rejoiced likewise, declaring that God had made the country, and that it was good.

But with the coming of winter, we began to plan. Perhaps we did not confess it, but the old habit of restlessness, and the need of change, were not wholly dead. We could not now look up a new habitation and call in the moving-man, as in the bygone van-dwelling days, nor did we wish to. We were satisfied, on the whole, and congratulated ourselves that our moving-days were over.

But we did like to experiment. We liked to change things about to see how they would look in other

rooms, and we altered our sleeping arrangements no less than three times in one month. It gave us quite the old migratory feeling to be taking the beds to pieces, squeezing through the doors with the mattresses, and knocking things against the chandeliers. Perhaps the Precious Ones did not find this altogether satisfying. They declared that to them there was nothing that quite took the place of moving-day, when all restraints had been as naught, and they had raced in and out with a wild freedom, or gone on breathless voyages of discovery through a new suite of empty rooms. To their elders, it was sufficient unto the day and season. But as the year deepened we began to meditate, and to have plans. Dear heart! it is good to be young and unsatisfied, and to dream! It is

also good that the way of fulfilment is not revealed to us.

Arriving, as we did, in June, our first little garden had been a slight affair — experimental, as it were. Yet it had prospered and so prepared us for greater things. We owned the lot next to us, and the rear end of it we marked off for the sacrifice. We agreed that the grass was poor there, and that there was too much to mow, anyway. Also that another year we might as well have things growing that would be of more value than chickweed and dandelions. Then we decided to fence the little plot, and for that purpose I removed from the top of the house a rather remarkable railing, which the architect perhaps considered ornamental. He must have done so, for he put similar adornment on a number of other houses in our



neighborhood. We did not regard it with pleasure as a part of our abode, but it was just the thing for the garden, and matched the house in general design and color scheme. I superintended this piece of reconstruction, and did most of the work. I may say here that it was accomplished with more promptness and less waste of nerve tissue than any of the improvements that came later. The little double step which I built, one half leading down into the garden and the other to the front path, was a durable and even an artistic piece of work, accomplished with but a few minor accidents and scarcely any profanity. We played with these steps, and planned how the morning-glories would grow and cluster about them when spring came. The Precious Ones enjoyed them, too, and ran in and out, from

the garden to the path and from the path back to the garden, as often as two hundred times an hour. I suspect that it was the success of these steps and the fence alteration that encouraged us later to larger undertakings—undertakings that seemed beyond my mechanical skill and education, though as I reflect upon the matter I am inclined to wonder if any one could know less than those chosen to succeed me. But I am anticipating—I am not quite through with the fall gardening.

Two men came, and, turning over the little plot, took out something like three wagon-loads of excellent cobble, replacing them with other loads of a class of merchandise more likely to encourage the growth of vegetables. We realized now why the grass had languished at that end of the lot.

They also planted some plum and peach trees for us, and certain vines. Considering the fact that I could not watch them every moment, they did these things rather well. I was only obliged to move part of the vines, which was less fatiguing than if it had been the trees, or the three loads of cobble.

On the whole, they were accommodating, those gardeners, and anxious to please. If I wished a peach-tree to bear in August, they assured me that it would do so. If, upon reflection, I decided that September was the better month for that particular variety of peaches, they were ready to adjust the season instantly, and without extra charge. I altered the date on an Early Crawford as many as three times before I got it to satisfy me. I know I have the very best of everything, too, and all "true

to name." The men told me so. They assured me that there were no other tree men who were so strictly reliable in the matter of varieties, or who could get quite the special attention they received at the nurseries. They paused now and then to cite examples of their superior service, where results that were surprising, even amazing, in the way of growth and bearing, had followed. I suppose it is mingling with nature that makes all gardeners and tree men so guileless — so full of truth in many varieties, and of the gentle desire to please.

The Little Woman had not been idle. Seed catalogues began to arrive presently — wonderful pictorial affairs with illuminated fruit and flower displays on their covers. A few we had from the season before, but a good many new ones



"THEN THE SUPPLY BECAME GREAT ENOUGH FOR ALL".



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came by mail, and yet others from our good and thoughtful neighbors, who realized something of what we had undertaken. The Precious Ones revelled in the art work of these publications, and with each new arrival divided and disputed their claims. The Little Woman and myself found it hard to get a satisfactory look at the seductive pages, and for a time civil war seemed imminent. Then the supply became great enough for all, and, lost in their delectable contents, we constructed rare dream-gardens, oblivious to sombre skies and pelting rain.

Ah, me! what is more fascinating, when skies are gray and dead leaves fall, than a splendid catalogue wherein the fair flower of hope is perennial, and seed-time and harvest shall never fail? To picture a little plot, now harden-

ing with November frosts, growing warm and fecund with April sun and shower, ready to welcome in its bosom those tiny germs of life that are to be had in magic buff packets whereon are pictures that know no blight, and instructions so simple that even in mid-winter the garden of dreams becomes a joy as real as the blossoming beds of June!

We studied the catalogues assiduously, and "hardy," "half-hardy," "rows eight to twelve inches apart," "time of planting," and much similar phraseology became a part of our daily conversation. At intervals I made diagrams of different bed arrangements, showing how we could have more space for corn and less for beans and salad, or contrariwise. Then I showed how we might have small beds of a good many things, with



some cockscombs and zinnias and marigolds between, in the good old-fashioned way which we both loved. When it was not too bleak we went out into the little enclosure itself to study still further its possibilities and give reality to our dreams. One morning I went so far as to lay out its main divisions by making some paths of coal ashes. This was the first actual step in form, and the Little Woman began immediately to prepare lists of seeds.

Being not yet Christmas, it was still full early to begin ordering. Still, there is nothing like being forehanded in matters of preparation. Besides, to have things really under way would shorten the time of waiting.

There seemed to be a good deal that we had decided to have. At times I had vague doubts as to the

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matter of room. We wanted corn, beans, lettuce, radishes, parsley, rhubarb, beets, onions, spinach, cucumbers, canteloupes, and a pumpkin-vine, as a matter of course. No garden would be complete without these, and then we wanted all the old-fashioned flowers, and the old savors, too, — such as thyme, marjoram, and basil, — and a sun-dial. Also, we had determined to try Brussels sprouts, of which we were both fond, and we fell a prey to sundry other temptations, that with foliage luxuriant and verbiage attractive beset us on every page of our alluring lists. It seemed a good deal to get into a space somewhat less than thirty-five feet square, with the few odd corners of the previous year, but we determined to economize our ground as we had heard the German gardeners

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did, and leave no square inch untilled.

The Little Woman voluntarily became purchasing agent, and almost daily I mailed a stuffy little envelope containing an order and "enclosed stamps" to some producer of reliable seeds and convincing catalogues. We sent orders as far West as Iowa, where there was a firm whom the Little Woman declared she knew supplied good seeds, though I have yet to learn by what special means she acquired this knowledge. I suspect that she was influenced by their attractive "combination offers," whereby the purchaser could obtain a certain number of desirable varieties for what seemed an exceedingly reasonable amount. The word "collection" invariably attracted the Little Woman, while

“seven papers for ten cents” was positively irresistible.

Perhaps she was afraid the supply of collections would run short, or that the seed market would be cornered before spring, for when I suggested at last that possibly we were overdoing the thing, she continued to order these combinations surreptitiously, this being the only time but one I have ever known of her deceiving me — the other having been when once, long before, she had ordered from an insistent picture canvasser, as a present for me, an enlargement of her own portrait, taken with that of our elder hope — the latter in her innocent babyhood. The picture was not an artistic success, and the frame seemed unnecessarily ornate. I did not see it for three years after it was delivered, though to keep it concealed from me in the

narrow limitations of apartment life, and during our many migrations, must have exhausted a good deal of ingenuity as well as nerve force on the part of the Little Woman. The burden of guilt became too much for her at last. She broke down and confessed, selecting a moment of weakness on my part for the purpose.

She was less careful in the matter of the seeds. I suppose she knew that my own inclinations would make me lenient. Once, looking for the corkscrew, I found three different assortments of pansy seed in the knife drawer, while various other unfamiliar collections surprised me now and then by coming to light from unexpected corners and at unusual times. She knew full well that I could not resist the spell of those illuminated buff packets and the

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rattle of their magic contents. I merely ventured an opinion as to the number of acres we could now plant if we had them. Then, getting fairly into the spirit of it all, I went over the catalogues once more and made up and ordered a rather general selection of my own.

XI.

*The House of One Desire.*

HAVING now got the house well seeded down, we began to give some degree of attention to other matters. As the holidays drew near, and the luminous catalogues became less in evidence, we discovered that for some reason our home lacked that cheer and comfort so necessary to the enjoyment of gloomy fields. For one thing, the house was new, and the walls still white. This was depressing at times, even when the rooms were quite warm, but there was a greater need than that of decorated walls. On a dismal Sunday it became acute. Sometimes

we wandered from room to room, seeking a welcoming corner, and vaguely wondering what it was we craved that our satisfactory rugs and furniture did not supply.

It was better at evening, for then we could gather about the shaded lamp, but by day the dreariness palled and made the Sundays long. We realized our full need at Christmas-time — a happy Christmas, too, with a tree, a turkey, and some desirable additions to our bric-à-brac collection, lacking only that one rare nucleus, — without which Christmas in the country never will be complete, — the Open Fire!

We knew now what it was that we wanted. We had been without it so long we had forgotten, and in the whirl and jangle of flat life had not missed it. Now all at once the desire for it became so great



that it overshadowed for a time the bright catalogues, our seed packets, and our fair garden of dreams. It was useless on a sunless day to sit before a Chippendale cabinet or to toast our feet over a Turkish rug, even though we had paid more for these than the cost of a new chimney. They would not take the place of a chimney and the life-giving radiance of the open fire. These, before another winter, we would have, even at the sacrifice of a good many other things we had been considering.

It was not that we were cold — at least, not very cold. With the energetic little furnace below stairs we could make the house reasonably warm, even during a northwest gale. What we wanted was the serene comfort of seeing the fire itself, of poking at it, and making it leap up the chimney, —

when all outside was gray and night gathered along the fields. We said, and it is true, that a home without a fireside is not a home at all. We wondered what the man who built the house had been thinking of, not to have remembered this fact. He had given us a number of things we would have been willing to spare, if only the cost of them might be applied on a single open fire: the ornamental railing on the front veranda we could part with, also the carved oak mantels that were now but hollow mockeries, and seemed built mainly to hold some curiously mottled tiling which even with the aid of a screen we could not wholly forget. We said that we would have accepted a cheaper railing; that the plainest, oh, the very plainest of mantels would have sufficed, if only it had sur-

rounded that joy of joys, that radiant jewel of the household, an open fire! Sometimes, when I was sweeping snow from the walks and porches, the thought that there was no bright blaze waiting for me within made me almost morbid. I was moved to poetry on the subject:

“To cheerful warmth did we aspire  
Where the tide of fortune tossed us,  
Till our one desire was an open fire  
No matter what it cost us.”

We went so far as to try to utilize for the time being one of the pretty imitation mantels by making it serve as a framework for an imitation grate, to be filled with imitation coal and heated by the imitation gas supplied from our metre. But, alas, even this we could not have, for when the workmen came it was discovered that


our mantels were even more hollow and more of a mockery than we had supposed. The bronze fronts covered only some thin plaster and lath so inflammable that even the imitation fire we had planned was pretty certain to result in at least one genuine conflagration, with more or less annoying results. We were not as yet ready to sacrifice our rugs and our furniture, or even the house itself, for the sake of the fire thus obtained. True, we did imagine ourselves joining hands with the Precious Ones and doing a wild midnight dance about the leaping flames, getting for once thoroughly saturated with the glow and warmth and crackle of it as the blaze sprang upward to the stars. But it would be such a brief joy — and then the morning — it would likely be cold and windy — we

would burn our clothes and get ashes in our hair.

So we sighed and went back to our catalogues, our seed packets, and our plans. In time, the latter began to be definite. We would have an outside chimney built behind one of our toy mantels and so give it purpose. We would also leave an opening on the floor above, where we had concluded to locate our library, for the reason that the Precious Ones and their friends were in the habit of storming daily the room below stairs intended for the quiet company of books. We said we would be magnanimous and give it to the children, for keeps. We would put into it some things that nothing could make worse and let them have it.

I may say here that we did convert the library into a playroom,

and with results that on the whole have been satisfactory. It is hardly a gratifying place to one of æsthetic tastes, and it requires skill even in daylight to wend your way among the assortment of little chairs and carriages and tables set for parties, attended all day long by dolls of many sizes, and in various stages of decay. At night it is a land infested with snares and dead-falls, a place to be shunned by making the circuit of the hall and kitchen, so to avoid disaster and fervid words. But happy is the heart of childhood! careless of the requirements of art and order, or of the retributions of eternity. To them the days are all feasting and junket and wassail. Dark or bright, the mock banquet goes merrily on, while the hours are all sunny hours that speed with song and laughter and comforting



scrimmage, and bring bedtime all too soon.

Brief, heedless childhood! Take the best room in the house if you want it! Turn it into a repository for damaged vehicles and a feasting-place for decadent dolls! It will not be for long. Soon, oh, soon it will be orderly again, and clean, and silent, and we shall hunger for the grimy little hands, the noisy little feet, and the babel of confused tongues! The days fly and the years pass, and you will be young such a little time! On with the banquet! Bring all the headless dolls, and those both with and without stomachs, and let them feast! Put the library anywhere! Rather would I have it on the roof, than that the dolls should climb the stairs to dine!

My old habit of digression is strong. I must do something for

it and go on with my story. We planned the chimney, as I have said. We also talked about painting, paper-hanging, and of reclaiming the attic for my study.

The Little Woman was not altogether in accord with the last-named idea. The attic seemed a bleak and draughty place, where shadows lurked and dust formed windrows on the creaky floor. She did not quite foresee its possibilities, and, to be entirely truthful, I had some misgivings of my own, though I kept up a good front and assured her that she would not know the place when I was through with it.

We almost forgot the need of the alterations in the joy of planning them. It was not until we called in some people to make figures that we came down to hard realities again, and felt the true great-



ness of our need. In the chill that followed their estimates, the bare walls became still more disheartening, the useless mantels a yet greater mockery, while even the little frozen garden with its ash-strewn paths seemed so unpromising under the drear February skies that we were driven to another revel in our neglected catalogues, and several new packages of hollyhock seed, before we were equal to a new plan — this time for an altogether different improvement; one more expensive than anything heretofore considered.

I am convinced now that it was a summer architect that planned our house. Otherwise he would not have put three north windows — two little ones, with a big one between — in the dining-room, and left out a fireplace. It was some man who spends his winters

in a climate where they run open cars all the year round, and if my petitions are heeded he will spend eternity in a still more fervent latitude. When the gales of March came down from the Adirondacks, and the heat fled to the other end of the house, our dining-room became a dismal place indeed. We kept the north shutters closed, and put an assortment of bedding between the shutters and the glass, but this, in spite of the two east windows, where a polar sun sometimes looked in, added much to the gloom of the comfortless little twelve by twelve box that had been so cheery through the days of summer-time. We said that another year we would have storm-windows, at least. And then, suddenly, I was seized with an inspiration in the way of a plan that made all before it seem poor and trifling.

I feel that the few and simple words with which I am obliged to convey the idea will give but a feeble hint of what the hope of its realization meant to us on that bitter St. Patrick's Day of its conception. Briefly, then, it was to take out those three terrible windows on the north, convert the opening into an arch leading to an eight-foot extension backed by a glorious fireplace — a radiant and boundless joy! The two narrow windows we would reset across the corners, while the large one would do for a library extension above, where, in the same new chimney, there would be still another open fire that would lend serene enchantment to our friendship with the quiet books.

The idea was breath-taking. We spoke of it in subdued voices — almost in whispers, perhaps fear-

ing that it would take fright and leave us. Then we became excited and forgot that we were cold. Also we became reckless. Let the mock mantels go! One was in the play-room. The Precious Ones had no taste, anyway! They could put their toys on it! The one in the parlor we would partially conceal with furniture and bric-à-brac. Let everything go — everything but the extended dining-room, with its stately arch, its real old-fashioned brick and mortar mantel of our own planning, its open fire of crackling logs and dancing flames! It would be the easiest thing in the world to accomplish! All we needed was money, and we would save and pinch and do without everything else we had planned — everything except the garden, of course — for this one great boon!

I made a carefully drawn plan

at once. I designed the fireplace and brick mantel after one at my club in town, and sketched the little window-seat that was to occupy one entire end of the extension. I even hung some pictures on the wall, set some plates and pitchers and things on the mantel, swung a crane with a gipsy kettle above artistically designed flames, while before the blaze, casting its shadow on the fire-lit floor, I placed a great easy chair! Once more our house was a house of dreams, — our garden abloom, — our world a dream-world! I did not sleep well that night, and, behold, when I waded home from the station next evening, the barren fields were filled as with June glory, for fortune, who sometimes neglects, but never quite deserts, her trusting children, had once more smiled, — a labor of long months, another dream,

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had found at last acceptance and reward. Not only could we have our beautiful extension, but our painting and our papered walls, and we could reclaim the desert waste at the top of the house where I had planned my den. We might, of course, have applied the sum on our payments, but there was no hesitation, or if there was it was scarcely noticeable, when we remembered this alternative. We had found out at last what we wanted, and Providence had put the means of possession in our hands. We were in no mood to quarrel with Providence. Eagerly we watched the sun in its slow pendulum swing to the northward, and stepped at last into the first sunny days of springtide, with all the joy that hope and health and fond anticipation can bring to the heart of youth.

## XII.

### *The Finding of Adelia.*

**I** MUST pause here to record the advent of two new elements — the Tiny Small One, and Adelia.

The Tiny Small One came along on a bleak day, to end happily one of those epochs of mingled hope and anxiety, which have filled the world with love and little folks since joy first blossomed in the Happy Valley and morning lay upon the Hills of Eden.

The new epoch did not begin peacefully. The Tiny Small One was not contented with things as she found them, and knew of but one way to express disapproval. I

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cannot imagine where she learned this method of protest, but wherever it was, she had been carefully taught. When she was something less than a moment old she followed the lamp with eyes that perhaps but just before had closed on the glories of eternity. Then, lifting up her voice, she denounced our feeble glow in terms that could be heard by all the people who had lent us seed catalogues, and saved us the necessity of carrying the news. We thought she would conclude presently, and were rather rejoiced by the fact that at least she had good lungs. But as the hours lagged on and the end was not in sight, we said that we were more than satisfied with her vocal strength, and that we would induce her to take the rest needed by us all.

We tried several arguments.



Neighbors came and went, and left an assortment of teas and good advice. She declined the advice. She took the teas with protest. I did not blame her much, for there were a good many kinds. I don't know just how many, but I remember camomile, catnip, and anise, and English breakfast with a dash of rum.

She showed her good taste by preferring the last named. When the combination worked properly, the household lay down to brief periods of pleasant dreams, and was not particular as to the locality of its couch or the nature of its draperies. Then the dynamo would go off again and the machinery start. I constructed an arrangement over the gas-jet to warm her different kinds of beverages, but nothing seemed to get hot except my fingers and my temper, and I remember

saying some things that I have been trying ever since to forget!

It was a week of education. I have always been rather particular about my pillows and my hours of retiring. It had been my customary remark, when sleep was the subject under discussion, that unless I retired regularly I could not "knit up the ravelled sleeve of care." I could do it now. I could knit at any odd moment when the Tiny Small One chose to attend to her own knitting, and so give me a chance. I could knit standing up, simultaneously heating tea and my fingers over a Welsbach mantle. I could even slip in a few stitches while the spoon travelled from the cup of camomile to the lip of lamentation, and as for pillows, I found that the slender uprights of an iron bed not only sustained but soothed me

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to sweet oblivion whenever the Tiny Small One yielded briefly her privilege and gave the uprights and oblivion a chance.

Even the Precious Ones became critical. They had been pleased with the general idea of a miniature addition to their household, — a doll that could move and feel and see and cry, — but the selection we had made did not please them. She overdid the last item. They suggested that we “take her back” and exchange her for a more satisfactory specimen.

And now came the other interesting experience — to us, I mean. We discovered one day that we must replace our household assistance, and that we had but a brief time in which to readjust matters. Fortunately Sunday was at hand, and, securing first editions and an early train, — the latter by a

scratch, — I set out for the city to pick up any desirable domestic worm that might not be already captured, and that would agree not to turn under the pink-heeled tyranny of the Tiny Small One.

On the way in I read feverishly any columns that seemed promising, and made notes of addresses, regardless of nationality and color, and varied as to locality. Then I arranged a sequence of investigation, prepared with a view to time-saving and trolley connections.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of Washington Place I made a brief incursion into Ireland. The inhabitant looked me over carefully, and with doubtful approval. Then she asked concerning the number of members in my family, their ages, the size of my abode,

its convenience to the station, and probable value.

I was convinced presently that she had missed her calling. As a census-taker, an assessor, or a land-agent she would have been a shining success. She may have been so as a domestic, but she did not impress me as such. However, I made the best showing I could. I left out the halls in giving the number of rooms, shortened the distance to the station to a dead run, forgot the bric-à-brac when it came to the assessment, and did as well as possible by the Precious Ones, including the Tiny Small One, of whom I said that she was a healthy child, and growing daily in grace and good manners. The question of wages was secondary. What I needed was help.

It was a hopeless appeal. Again she looked me over, and an-

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nounced that she preferred city life. She added that she was in the habit of attaching herself to the household of "praists," and therefore accustomed to an atmosphere of quiet and seclusion, which I was obliged to admit was for me a thing of the dead past. I was plainly out of it on several counts. We parted soon and amicably, with expressions of mutual regret and regard.

I rode ten blocks and climbed four flights of very gloomy, smelly stairs into Sweden. I had been hopeful of Sweden. I had heard that Swedish girls were good girls, and even when the square-built muscular maiden came out into the hall to talk to me, closing the door firmly behind her, I was only vaguely alarmed. Through the odorous dark I spoke to her of green fields. I besought her to

take up a share of my burdens in a land where sweet spring days were near, and where all day long were birds that would carol to her of the far-off hills and fjords of her childhood. I wooed her with promises of several dollars per week and Sundays out. She listened until I was quite empty, then:

“You lav in contry?”

“Well, yes, it is called the country. It is really part of the city, you know, with trains every few minutes. Nearer, in fact, than many points of Harlem. We —”

“I tank I not go to contry.”

“Oh, but you would like it out there. It is beautiful in summer — like Sweden,” which remark was probably a mistake on my part. Had she been attached to Sweden she would have remained there. Indeed, it seems to me that a good

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deal of this so-called affection for the fatherland is a pleasant fiction. I have yet to find the first wage-earner who has any genuine desire to return to his lakes and fells, his fjords, or his jungles, however much he may warble or babble of those beyond the sea. I wax a bit poetic myself, sometimes, and recall certain environs of childhood with affection. But I have no desire to return to them, or to locate in a place recommended as being of similar topography.

The maid of Sweden, whose square outline only was visible through the redolent dusk, repeated that she did not sigh for green fields.

"But what's the matter with the country?" I asked.

She reflected on the matter before replying.

"I — I tank I get sack dere."



" Sick? Why, the country's the place to get well in. How do you get sick? "

This required still more reflection. She had to think up something. Something good and hard that would close the interview. I had lost hope, of course, but I was not without curiosity as to the malady that attacked this robust young person when withdrawn from the madding crowd.

" I — I tank I have pains! " she announced at last, and there was a note in her accents that caused me to edge a bit closer to the head of the stairs.

" Ah, pains. And — eh, would you — would you mind telling me where you have these pains? I have some medical knowledge — I — "

" I tank I have pains in my lags! I tank I know I have my

pains! I tank I know what I do!  
I tank I not go to contry —!"

But I was half-way down the top flight by this time, acquiring speed as I descended into the mystery of blackness below.

"'Maid of Sweden, when we part,  
Give me, please, a running start,'"

I murmured as I touched bottom and escaped into the soiled misery of the jangling street.

It was not far to Germany, and but a step across the Rhine — the hall, I mean — into France. But the German inhabitant was not pleased with my statistics, while the grisette over the way was coy, and shrugged her shoulders at mention of the country. Clearly the servant question was no small factor in the commuter's problem. That these benighted creatures

should prefer the wretched, soulless round and wrangle of their present existence to the clean bed and outlook I offered them was not easy to understand. But I was in no mood to philosophize. I made my way to West Forty-third Street for an expedition into the Congo country.

Pickaninnies with twisted bob-bets of hair infested the entrances to the kraals, and round black eyes shone and lured me along dark passages and up winding stairs. "Ring Rev. Medders' bell" was the instruction on one advertisement, and I was presently ushered into the Medders parlor, which I am obliged to confess was cleaner, more homelike, and less redolent than some of my former experiences. Then the lady I had called to see entered, and I gasped. She was of the gold-spectacled

chocolate type, and stylish, no name. I could not at once state my errand for admiring her clothes. When I did so she regarded me with compassion, but with no sign of favor. She spoke with a drawl.

"Oh, no, sah. I couldn't go to th' country, sah!"

"Ah, I see. You prefer the city life."

"Yes, sah — always wuk in town, sah, — 'ceptin' when I goes to the country to boahd, sah."

"Vacation, I suppose."

"Yes, sah, when it's wahm, sah. I goes to the seashoah then, sah."

"You wouldn't — eh — care to board with us awhile now, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, sah. Too cold, sah. Much too cold this time o' yeah, sah."

I was about to tell her that there

was one place where it was warm enough in all seasons, and that she might go there. She volunteered presently to introduce me to some friends below stairs, who perhaps would be willing to consider my needs. At least, they might know of some kindly care-ridden soul to whom our country home would prove an asylum of repose.

There was a sound of revelry as we drew near the dim doorway below. It ceased at our knock, and a moment later the door opened to such an assortment of colored society as it had been never my privilege to enter. My expedition had reached darkest Africa at a step. When she of the gold spectacles announced my mission they crowded about to listen, and to regard curiously the stranger from so far a clime. Only one of them had any definite knowl-

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edge of our place on the map. She was a jolly, fat old soul toward whom my heart warmed.

"Oh, yas, sah. I knows dat place, sah; I been out once on a trolley — to a picnic."

"Don't you want to go to another picnic?" I said, "and not come back?"

This resulted in huge merriment all around, and general good feeling predominated. A voice in the back of the crowd piped up:

"How much you want to pay to go out in de country, sah?"

I named a figure which seemed to me reckless. It was received with scant enthusiasm.

"Oh, 'shaw, I couldn't go foh dat, sah! I gets dat right heah in town, sah!"

"But it's better in the country than it is here, and you couldn't spend your money out there."

I saw instantly that this was a fatal mistake. There was another burst of merriment, and she of the piping voice became the butt of their good-humored raillery.

"You go out dere, honey, an' you cain't buy nary thing lessen you taken de train," laughed a tall creature with resplendent "carbobs."

"What you gwine do, Julia, when you wan' take a li'l promenade?" asked a gentleman with gaily plaided tie and patent leathers.

"Julie might set on de fence an' talk to Brer Rabbit, foh comp'ny," suggested a bowed old Remus, from the corner, and I found myself enjoying it as much as they did.

Oh, children of the Afric sun!  
Undismayed in adversity — light-  
hearted and lavish in prosperity —

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extravagant in good clothes and grief! I rejoice with you in your luxury of to-day, and in your careless heed of a morrow for which other joys and other means are somehow to be provided. The sun, that greatest of all providers, has filled you with a serene faith in its unfailing dispensations, — an unwavering trust in a beneficence that lies behind!

I was loath to leave these merry souls, and they seemed sorry to have me go. Had my business been less urgent, I might have put in the afternoon with them. As it was I bade them an affectionate good-by, and they followed me out into the hall with a friendly interest that reached anywhere within the limits of Manhattan Island. The stout lady of the trolley went a step further.

“I’d go out dar wid you, sah,



ef I could leeave," she declared, regretfully. " But I have to stay an' cook foh mah fam'ly, an' cose mah fam'ly has to stay heah."

I had an impulse to say that if she would only come I would take the " fam'ly," too, but I resisted, and was presently in the cheerless street again, where night was coming down and the yellow gas beginning to flicker dimly.

I began to have the feeling of a man who, penniless and hunting for work, is turned away on every hand. Who sees people hurrying busily to and fro, but for him no place in all that bustling throng. Who dreads to go home empty-handed with the word failure on his lip. Work was my problem, as well as his — somebody to do it. Workers there were, plenty of them, everywhere, but none for me. I was not quite penniless, but

I might as well have been, so far as fulfilling my mission was concerned. Indeed, it seemed that I was likely to become so as the price of success. My dilemma was sprouting a pair of horns.

I began to doubt some of the stories I had read of people perishing for the want of work. I wished I might meet one or two who had perished to a degree that a job in the country would tempt them. It seemed to me that there was another side to this labor question. I regretted some of the things I had said on the subject, and began to shift my pity. I knew I would need it myself if I went home with the word failure on my lip.

I was in East Forty-fourth Street by this time, climbing a flight that led to what proved to be a better part of Ireland than I had encountered hitherto. I was hope-

less, but I had resolved to make one final effort, and then keep straight on to the dark, sluggish river that had already hidden so many world-weary mortals in its quiet depths.

A bright-faced matron opened the door for me, and asked me into a small but not lavish parlor, announcing that she of the advertisement would presently appear. I gave myself up to relaxation. Then the door opened, and there was a slight rustle, as of ironed skirts. A trim figure stood before me, with a hesitating, half-embarrassed smile and a gentle repose of manner that seemed a direct inheritance from some far-off ancestor of Ireland's royal line. Instinctively I rose and offered her my seat. She remained standing. When I had stated my errand — not because I expected any result,

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but because I had no other excuse for being there — she said, simply, and in a voice that was liquid music, that she would go.

I did not believe it, of course. I knew that I must be dreaming. Perhaps I had already thrown myself into the river and this was one of the hallucinations of drowning. I took a long breath, coughed, pinched myself, and said it all over. She said again that she would go. That she liked children, especially tiny small ones; also the country, particularly at this season.

Then I knew it was she who was dreaming, and I tried to awaken her to a realization of what she was saying. Still she insisted that she would go — that the place would suit her — that she would come out on the morrow, prepared to stay.

I was willing then to take advantage of her weakness, and suggested that she come at once — that I would take her to the station — that I would see to getting her trunk there — that I would carry it myself, if necessary. She repeated softly and firmly her former proposition. She would come, and she would come on the morrow. I was obliged to be content with this, though I had a cankering dread that by morning she would realize what she had promised, or that somebody would steal her away from me before she could render fulfilment. I had some thought of sitting on the door-step all night to prevent this disaster.

Arriving home, I was almost afraid to confide my good fortune to the Little Woman. I know now how the man feels when he has really got a job at last, and cannot

sleep for fear there will be some hitch before he can be installed. Bright and early I looked in once more on the gentle face of our Adelia, for such was her soft "entitlement." I feared she had changed her mind. She had not done so, — neither had she altered her charm. When she failed to arrive that evening, I was in the depths of the penniless man whose job is postponed and in the balance.

Once more I called. She was full of apologies. Her trunk had miscarried. She would be out on the morrow, certainly.

I went home with a heavy heart. The Precious Ones and the Little Woman still had food. The Tiny Small One was supplied with tea, but to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow — Adelia was trifling with us! She meant to let us

perish! She was cold and heartless beneath a soft exterior — but, lo, early on the morrow, an express wagon drove up hastily and unloaded a heavy trunk. A neat black-gowned figure tripped up to our door, the sun that had been obscured for days broke out overhead, and all the world grew fair in the arrival of our Adelia!

## XIII.

*The Beginning of All Things.*

**T**HE day of Adelia's arrival is memorable for several reasons.

Some days before I had missed my train by falling over a bundle of ill-timed shingles. Arising in wrath and denunciation, I had found myself face to face with a humble-looking, apologetic man, sturdy of architecture and rustic in design. His mild manner and gentle sympathy dissolved my acrimony. I lingered to talk with him on the subject of attachments, one of which he was then adding to a stable.

I became deeply interested in



his honest counsel and tendency to modest estimates, — so much so that I had well-nigh missed my next train. He called the next evening to make figures on our job.

We were impressed with the quiet, easy manner of his method. Some of them had insisted on measuring everything in sight, from the height of our foundation to the thickness of our picture moulding. After which they had required at least a week to add all these figures together and multiply them by the general area of a lot of things that were somewhere else. They had been critical, too, almost disagreeable, in the matter of my carefully prepared ground-plan and elevations. They had wanted to know if they were to furnish the pitchers and things on the mantel, and the arm-chair, with a shadow on the firelit

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floor. Our new man did none of these things. He admired my drawings, and he seemed to know our measurements by intuition. When I had explained to him that we were putting the attachment on the house chiefly to get the fire-places, and that these must be successful, with proper draught, he entered thoroughly into the spirit of the idea. I led him to the garret and showed him where I desired a wide dormer-window, with broad seat, and diamond-paned hinged sash that opened to the sunrise. How all the way around the room I wanted small uprights, upon which I would myself tack the gray deadening felt that was to cover the wall and the rafters overhead. I pointed to the opening in the roof, where the iron box-cover was to be replaced by a small hinged skylight; to a spot in the

floor, where there would be a register connecting with the furnace below, and to the chimney at the end, in which I had planned a pipe-hole for a Franklin stove, with a shelf supported by two rustic posts, one on each side, to complete the mantel effect. He understood at a glance, and suggested one or two things which I had overlooked, but which appealed to me instantly as being in line with my own thought, and desirable.

I had been obliged to beat my ideas into the others, with a force that was not always pleasant. They had wanted me to have it *their* way, and they had ended by putting on a price that prohibited my having it at all. In our new man I recognized a rare soul under a humble exterior — a creature of sympathetic imagination and open heart. I also recognized the hand

of Providence in that bundle of shingles, and was strengthened in my theories concerning the larger meaning of life's most trivial incidents.

When we went below, I expected him to say that he would prepare an estimate in a few days. He did nothing of the sort. He took a leaf from his simple notebook, and on the side not containing the advertisement, wrote, with a pencil:

"I wil do all work as spesifide in yur plans, garet and dinin room for —" The figure named was fully a third less than that of any former estimate.

We could have fallen upon his neck, and we agreed hastily, lest he should change his mind. He showed no disposition to do this, but assured us that he would have the job done in a jiffy — that he

would work it in between two larger jobs, one just finished, and another still to come. I inquired jocosely if the big job just finished was the attachment on the stable. We parted with merriment and good-fellowship all around. It was not until he was gone that we spelled out his signature, and became jocose again to find that by some curious freak fortune had allotted to him the strangely inappropriate name of Braikup — W. Braikup.

It was on the morning of Adelia's arrival that he had begun operations. There were three men in the garret when she came, and two outside, digging a trench for the foundation. There were also two men in the upper rooms, preparing the walls for paper, for we had contracted our painting and decorating in the meantime. Still

others were placing scaling-ladders on the outer walls, and stirring pots of variously colored pigments. Furthermore, it proved to be the first warm, sunny day of April, — a day we could not think of wasting, — and after the hastiest of introductions the Tiny Small One was given over to the gentle Adelia, while with rake and shovel and magic buff packets, and accompanied by the Precious Ones similarly laden, the Little Woman and I descended joyously the steps that led to the Garden of Our Dreams.

It was indeed a memorable day. Never have we had so much going on at once. What Adelia's first impression of us was it would be difficult to say. I had referred to our home as being rather quiet. Now, with saws and hammers in the garret, laughter and converse

in the bedrooms, — frequently carried on through the open windows with those on the ladders without, — with the sound of pick and shovel below, and the whole mingled with the occasional protest of the Tiny Small One, who found fault with certain features of the new arrangement, there was hardly the atmosphere of stillness and peace which I may have led her to expect. But the Little Woman and I rejoiced. We had come through a long, dreary winter, brightened only by our General Happiness, and our plans. Now the glad and wakening spring was upon us, and with it the beginning of a fulfilment that would presently be complete. Ten days was the time limit set by each of our various contractors, though we agreed privately that we would be satisfied if everything could be

done in two weeks, when, with our new clean house and our verdant and radiant garden, our Happiness would become a thing to incite the envy of angels.

I turned up a section of the moist earth, and we dug, and delved, and planted according to directions, while the fresh soil grew warm and fragrant under the sun's beneficent rays and fairly intoxicated us with the fumes and vapors of spring. Oh, what is so rare as the first blessed day of April gardening! To go down into the little plot that so long has lain bleak and desolate and hardened by winter frosts — to find it mellow, warm, and ready for the germs of early planting. To dig and stir and furrow, in the comfort of the sun's life-giving elixir, which presently must waken the first tender shoot and leaflet of



bloom and salad and relish into tiny rows of gratifying beginning that shall wax soon to fair and succulent maturity!

I recall now that physically I was none too well on that glorious day. I had dined with some friends on the evening before, and was regretting certain of the festivities, and the lateness of adjournment, which had necessitated my return by the slow and circuitous trolley. Ordinarily I should not have engaged in active pursuits, feeling as I did, but on this day of days I found restorative in the balm of sunlight, and in toil the anodyne of remorse.

I brought out a rocking-chair, from which I observed and criticized the Little Woman's methods of planting, and from which, in turn, she instructed me as to the best processes of turning and stir-

ring the soil. We were not wholly confined to the instructions on the packets. She had ideas and traditions of her own, while I had preserved memories from a rural childhood when gardening had been a Saturday punishment so bitter that the memory of its details could never be entirely effaced. We discussed several things, and endeavored to combine our wisdom with that of the buff packets.

It was not always easy to do. The packets said nothing as to the light and dark of the moon, which we both remembered as being important, though we disagreed in our moon science as to whether underground things, like radishes, should be planted in the dark of the moon, and salads, etc., in the light period, or *vice versa*. We finally discovered that we did not know whether the present period

was dark or light, also that we did not know which was which. We decided that we were probably betwixt and between, and would take chances.

We also disagreed as to the depth which certain seeds should be planted, and were grieved to find that the packets did not always instruct us on this vital point. The Little Woman wanted to plant deep and well, while I held for surface sowing, with a light top dressing. When the argument became strenuous, we relieved ourselves by denouncing the Precious Ones for getting in our way. Not but what they deserved it. There was any amount of room as yet, but it seemed to give them special comfort to dig and rake and discuss their own problems in each particular spot preëmpted by their elders. When we finally could

persuade them to dig apart, they made their gardens in unusual places, and with no regard as to form, or the points of the compass. It was of small moment, however, if they would only keep out of our chosen territory, and so let us dig and plant and discuss our happiness in peace.

It would be lovely, we said, to have this little garden of our own — to go down into it in the early morning and gather things fresh and green, with the dew on them. And with how little real effort each day such a spot could be cared for and made to yield abundantly! It was too bad that every one with a bit of ground like this did not improve it, instead of letting it go to waste.

The bucolic spirit waxed strong as we agreed to these things. We united in a resolve to spend no

money for garden stuff during the season, and our prospective returns of salads and green things grew as we talked, until we even had some notion of supplying our grocer with our surplus in exchange for a few staple articles that our garden might not produce. Dear heart! It is indeed sweet to have a spot where all is green and fresh and dewy, but sweeter still the memory of days like these in the heart's unfading gardens!

We had an audience presently, for our neighbors had awakened to the fact that a general upheaval was taking place in and about our domicile. They leaned over the fence to comment on my rocking-chair method of gardening, and to offer valuable counsel and encouragement. God bless our neighbors! They have been good

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to us, and they have loaned us their garden tools in time of need.

We sowed beds of lettuce, chicory, parsley, radishes, onions, and peas that first day, and some beet and spinach seed about the young currant bushes. The beet and spinach idea was mine, and for the purpose of economizing space. I said we could gather them in their youth to mingle with the dandelions, which grew plentifully without planting. We agreed that we had not thus far taken advantage of a good deal that nature had done for us in the way of dandelions and the like, and both confessed a weakness for old-fashioned greens. Most of the seeds planted on this first day were of the Little Woman's Iowa brand, in which her faith was still strong. Also I may say here that it was not unjustified. The varieties result-

ing were not always of the choicest, but they did grow, whereas certain of my own selections proved rather disappointing in this particular. However, I am anticipating.

We did not follow instructions in the matter of rows. We agreed that we could not afford fifteen inches for a row of lettuce, even though the packet said the heads "frequently measured twenty inches across." Three such heads would quite fill the space we had allotted for this particular salad. We said we would have smaller heads and more of them, and that we would cut our salad according to our conditions. We compromised at last by sowing it broadcast, with the idea of gradually thinning as it matured—this being one of the Little Woman's inspirations. In the matter of radishes we planted two kinds, — the long

and the round, — the former being the Iowa brand. We halved the recipe on these, planting six inches apart instead of twelve, for we said we didn't care for radishes more than three inches in diameter, anyway, and would probably pull most of them even before they got to be that size. In fact, we pursued this general plan throughout. We were not going regularly into market-gardening, and would be content with smaller vegetables, and more of them. Two feet for a row of peas was absurd in a garden thirty-five feet square. Two rows in two feet seemed extravagant enough, but we grudgingly yielded this much, and finally levelled and raked and patted down our beds, — planted a shingle at each, with the name of contents and date of planting, — and stood off to admire our work.




"Who have you got buried there?" called our neighbor from across the fence.

Then we saw what we had not noticed before, that our little garden beds, being pretty much of a size, and rather narrow and trim and neat, with the inscribed shingle at each one, did look a good deal like graves. We laughed, however, and said they were not graves, but beds, for our hopes to rest in, overnight. Then the Little Woman went in to comfort the Tiny Small One, who had done worthily, on the whole, while I remained to plant four tiny beds of herbs next the fence. We had sage from the year before, and, beginning there, I added thyme, marjoram, savory, and basil, in rotation, so that we might say, "Sage, it's thyme Marjoram was savory

to Basil," and so remember without the need of headboards.

Perhaps the Little Woman was not so cheerful when I went in. The rooms up-stairs were littered with lime and ladders and pails of smelly stuff, while workmen were tramping about with an utter disregard of neatness, or family convenience and privacy. Adelia and the Tiny Small One had worn and discontented looks. The Precious Ones, as usual, were clamoring for food. The masons and painters below had been getting water from the kitchen. They had tramped mortar all about the floor, and slopped water into it wherever possible. Whatever had been made in the way of progress was as yet almost imperceptible to our unpractised eyes.

I said that of course we must expect these things, and that prob-



ably they had done a good deal more than we could see. Also that we must get along as cheerfully as we could while these people were with us, and be thankful that it was to be only two weeks instead of four, as had been the case with some neighbors, who had been victimized by irresponsible workmen.

We cheered up a bit in these reflections, though, to tell the truth, it was not easy to see where we were going to sleep, and that night, when the moon rose over our incipient garden, which we looked down upon from an upper window, the trim, narrow little beds, with the shingle planted at the head of each, did look uncommonly like graves.

## XIV.

*Pussum.*

**B**UT there is one important member of our household whom I have overlooked far too long. I refer to T. Pussum, our benign and reliable cat.

He came to us in his early life, during the first summer of our suburban residence. He was not an ostentatious cat, but a bedrabbled and bleary-eyed shred of gray that sat guarding our milk-bottles one morning when I opened the back door. Indeed, I have seldom seen a more forlorn specimen than was our stately Pussum at this the moment of our introduction.

Perhaps he was a prodigal that

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had travelled far, wasting his substance in riotous living. At least, he was very footsore, and had no substance left that seemed of any value to respectable people. A vagabond and a tramp, depending on charity and odd jobs to help him on his way, he was doubtless guarding our milk supply with the hope of some slight reward. We didn't need his protection, but from the depths of my heart and one of the bottles a modest salvage was granted. I put some milk in a pan and he drank it greedily, without thanks. I did not invite him in. We had no cat as yet, but we had one planned, and it was not of this design. I hoped that when filled he would fare onward to lay protection and tribute on other milk-bottles than ours.

I forgot him presently, and was surprised when, somewhat

later, I heard the Little Woman announce that there was a kitten clinging to the screen door and crying to come in. I went out to investigate, and found him half-way up the screen. Not being able to get through the wire, he had climbed it.

“It is unnecessary to come in,” I said. “You can thank me from where you stand, or sit, or whatever you call it. I appreciate your desire, now that the pangs of hunger are allayed, to make due acknowledgment, but time is precious, and you should be on your way. There are other milk-bottles to be saved. The future is full of them. Besides, it is pleasanter without. We are barely settled. We could not entertain you properly, even if we would. Go your way. Get off of our screen door, and hence! Rapidly!”

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He refused to hence. With food he had acquired vigor, and a voice strong for his size.

"Perhaps," I said, "he wishes more food."

I pushed open the screen and begged him to descend. This was impossible — he had not planned for retreat. His tendency was to climb higher.

I was not eager to touch him, but there seemed no alternative. I detached him from the wire and placed him before the pan. Again he ate. Again, filled with the milk of human kindness, he climbed up to vociferate his thanks and his intention of abiding with us always.

I tried to shake him off — it was no use. I unhooked him repeatedly, and placed him in remote corners of the property. He could beat me back to the screen door, even allowing me as much

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as ten yards start. We repeated this race till finally I beat him. He was fully five steps behind when I got my hand on the knob, but he was coming, with headway.

I was rather warm now, and slightly annoyed by his overweening desire to become our guest. With my hand still on the knob I awaited him grimly. I did not kick him. I would scorn to kick a cat — especially, such a cat. I simply lifted him with my foot and planted him in our experiment garden. He described an arc, and disappeared among the tomato-vines. Flinging wide the door, I rushed in, unwilling to investigate the result of my violence. A sound from behind caused me to start and turn. He was half-way up the screen and going higher.

I opened the portal gently.



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"Come in, little stranger," I said.

And thus it was the prodigal became a part of our household.

As the days passed the stranger grew strong and beautiful. Not being pure Maltese, I named him at first Maltine, but this title somehow seemed frivolous, and savored of advertising; whereas "*Pussum*" came trippingly from the tongue, and expressed more affectionately the deep regard and admiration which he presently awakened in us all. Whatever may have been his past, it was left behind with his bleary eyes and his emaciated tail. Both were fine and expressive within the month, and daily he grew in grace and noble self-respect. None knew him but to love him, and the occasional mouse, which I caught for him in a trap, was a slight token awarded

in appreciation of his sterling qualities and unfailing appetite.

I have never seen a cat display more eagerness for mice. For as much as half a day, sometimes, he would watch the empty trap, doubtless recalling joys already tasted, and those still to come. For me to begin setting it was the signal for violent enthusiasm on the part of our faithful mouser, and at morning he invariably rushed to the spot where the trap was known to do its most efficient work. There is even a rumor among the Precious Ones that our Pussum once captured a mouse on his own account. But the testimony in the case is confusing and contradictory. I am forced to believe the reports of this mouse's death have been "grossly exaggerated." However this may be, the advent of Pussum has been much to us all,

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and if we knew his birthday we would add it to our anniversaries.

Pussum is reliable in many ways. Even from the beginning he was inclined to be sober and dignified, and did not destroy frail objects in the wild gambols of kittenhood. I have wondered sometimes what his earliest days were like — those weeks that must have passed before that memorable morning when I found him protecting our milk supply. Perhaps he really never had known childhood's happy hour, but only a brief period of bitterness which he was anxious to forget. It is true, he would allow the Precious Ones to wheel him about in their little carriages, and seemed to take comfort in this apparent frivolity, of which he is still fond. It is his only diversion. He was old and reflective, even in his

youth, and the ways of other cats are not his ways.

Most young cats, and many old ones, are common thieves — ready the moment your back is turned to leap on the dinner-table and grab something. Pussum is distinctly uncommon in these matters. He would scorn to make a flying exhibition of himself, like that, or to conceal his designs. He even may be left in the dining-room alone, with safety. It is only when we are all seated and general feasting is in progress that, with the aid of a convenient chair, he will calmly climb up and leisurely select such portions of the food as please him. If restrained at these times, he regards us with reproach, and continues his selection. If repulsed, he retires with dignity, and returns presently with renewed determination. After all, he is the same kit-

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ten who once climbed the screen door, and rallied to victory from the tomato-vines. He has only improved in his manners. When he wishes to come in now he does not climb the screen. Neither does he leap through the door at the first opportunity, or push his head and one foot in, like a book agent. He sits on the step until he is invited, and he will sit there all day if necessary. But though a hero of patience and perseverance, Pussum is not distinguished as a warrior. He has faith in discretion, and is willing to rely on his speed rather than upon his skill and prowess in conflict. Not that he is a coward, at least, not cravenly so. When once faced in the right direction, I have seen him defy successfully a random dog, or the ten-pound Tom Tiger across the way. His difficulty seems to be

in getting into the attitude and direction of war. Perhaps his object in running is to get far enough ahead to enable him to turn around. He does fight, too, for he sometimes bears the earmarks of battle. I suppose they catch him now and then. On the morning after Thanksgiving he had a lump on his forehead. Still more recently he returned after a night's absence in a mixed condition of mud and water and humiliation. He lamented dismally while I had him in the tub, probably explaining how the cyclone had overtaken him before he could make harbor, and giving other valuable testimony.

One night I heard a violent altercation just outside my window, and when no longer able to restrain my curiosity I arose and looked into the moonlight. A half-

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grown tree stands by our sidewalk. It was late autumn, and the leaves had disappeared. They had been replaced with something larger. I did not at first realize what were the black bunches that decorated the several limbs and forks of the little tree. Then one of the bunches moved. Then all of them howled. Then I observed that it was a tree of cats. On the tip-topmost bough there swung and balanced a feline form that evidently had been driven to a last retreat.

I descended to the kitchen and returned with coal. Leaning out, I flung a hurtling handful that resulted in a sudden and wild explosion of cats, leaving a single form still balancing on the topmost bough. Something about its outline caused me to discontinue the anthracite treatment. Then, the coast being quite clear, there

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was a cautious descent, a stealthy  
slipping along the path below, and  
into the white moonlight beneath  
my window there stepped with sol-  
emn tread our own great gray  
reliable Pussum.



XV.

*Paste-pot and Step-ladder.*

HOWEVER little our workmen may have accomplished the first day, I am sure now that it was more than they ever accomplished on any day succeeding. For one thing, a spell of bad weather came on and interfered with those outside. The inside men did not desert us. They came and went, leaving open doors, mud, and general distress behind. They seemed to be busy enough, but we confided to each other that if they would talk less they would perhaps get along faster.

They were filling the cracks in the walls, and usually worked in

separate rooms. They kept the door open between, and through it the tide of careless converse ebbed and flowed, echoing through the hollow spaces and resounding against bare, reverberant walls, beyond which the Tiny Small One was trying to find rest. When they had been with us a week they had done nothing that I was sure of except to make weird maps of our walls and fill my hair with calimine.

They did something the next day — they filled the house with a smell of fish. It was not of fresh fish, — I don't mind that so much, — but of a wayworn fish that has been sojourning in some secluded spot on shore during a period of warm weather. I declared that it was a nuisance, and that I would have it abated. They assured us that it was glue, and healthy.

Then I said that of course it might not be a nuisance, but that it smelt exactly like one, and I wished they would take it away.

It is not easy to be either systematic or good-natured when workmen are ordering you from one room to another, and hustling your things in a helter-skelter fashion that makes you grab for articles of virtu and needed apparel. Now and then we became excited, though fortunately at different times. There were moments when the Little Woman found it necessary to calm me, and once, when the men were handling our chattels with unusual vehemence, and she seemed a bit nervous, I turned to a soothing text and comforted her with that sweet line, "I will go softly — softly all my days." I even wrote it on a slip of paper and tacked it up, where she could

be reminded of it in moments of stress and weakness. It didn't stay long, of course. Nothing stayed where we put it now.

The situation began to tell on both of us; also upon Adelia. We had made some effort to maintain respectability, at first, and to preserve a certain dignity in her presence. Now, demoralization seemed inevitable. When I found a bunch of summer neckties in the kitchen and a charlotte russe in the parlor, I knew that we were degenerating, and that we were dragging Adelia down.

At the expiration of the ten allotted days there was not yet a strip of paper on the walls. They had made some effort at tinting the ceilings, according to contract, but had found our plaster of a nature that would not affiliate with calamine, and the contractor had

agreed to paper with plain tinted ingrain instead. I am glad now that this was done, for the paper is by far to be preferred, only I wish he hadn't made it an excuse for taking our men away and putting them on another job while, as he said, he was waiting for our "ceilings to come." We didn't see why he needed to do this. The "walls" were still within easy reach, and, bad as the situation had been, it seemed worse when the dilatory and loquacious workmen were gone, and we were left alone with our desolation, the end whereof was becoming each day more uncertainly remote.

Our paper man appeared one morning on a bicycle, carrying two rolls, one under each arm. But, alackaday! That for the side-wall, instead of being the thick silk-fibre cartridge we had

selected, — olive-hued, with a hint of gold in it, — now proved to be a flimsy, toneless stuff, without glow or soul, while the “ceilings,” waited for so long, were a disturbing and disastrous yellow. We became firm then, and it was time. We said no — we wouldn’t have it! We’d stop all proceedings first, and with bare walls and broken hearts go down to the ruin we had set out upon. We would stay unpapered through all eternity before we would put that yellow blight upon our coming days. When he realized how we felt, he took it away, sorrowfully, and lamenting our taste. Other days of woe and waiting passed. Why dwell upon them? The right paper came at last, both for ceiling and side-walls; the right burlap dado for the halls and dining-room. Piece by piece, strip by

strip, it went on. I did not hurry them now. I even abetted them, when they would all knock off for a day to go fishing, and generously take me along. On the whole, our man of decoration and his pleasant assistants were so much more faithful than our carpenters, our masons, our plasterers, our iron-workers, and all the rest of our motley and mendacious aggregation, that I remember them without bitterness, and, looking now at our restful green walls and recalling so many slighter joys that have been so much harder to obtain, I am truly grateful.

The painters being a part of this combination, my thanks extend to them likewise. When the days were sunny, they whistled and talked and tramped down our rose-bushes and such other vegetation as grew near the house. Then

they would apologize, and say, "Oh, they'll grow all right — you can't kill 'em," though we did not see why they should keep on trying to do so, or for what reason they should wish to paint a good deal of our shrubbery, when this was not in the contract, and was done at their own expense for time and material.

Yet they were good fellows, on the whole, and taught me how to catch weak-fish. I no longer cherish any ill-will because of the decorated honeysuckle, or even in memory of the pot of red paint I met one night on the cellar stairs. I should have preferred to meet it coming up, though I suppose results would have been about the same. The honeysuckle is green again, my bruises are healed, and the trousers have been exchanged with a pedler for an agate stew-



pan. Peace be with them, — the painters, I mean, — they got the house the right color, and they did not drop ladders on the Precious Ones, though many times they might have done so and been exonerated in a court of law.

## XVI.

*W. Braikup and Barney.*

I HAVE not forgotten our builder, W. Braikup. I shall never forget him. If I appear to have neglected him through the last few pages, it was only that I might give more careful attention to our decorations, and get the house thoroughly upset within before taking up the real business of disaster that presently laid its blight upon us.

Indeed, it was our builder who appeared to have forgotten *us*. Bad weather set in, as I have said, but he did not return with the sun. For days we picked our way about

a half-finished foundation, and swept lime from the back entry. Occasionally a workman would saunter in, look about, whistle a bar or two of some familiar air, and disappear. One day a pile of lumber was unloaded on the vacant lot adjoining, and our spirits rose. But the next day they came and carried most of it away again, so it was probably not intentional. Then two big locust posts, covered with some kind of vine, were one morning dragged into our lawn, and these I recognized as being the supports for my garret mantel. Again enthusiastic, I went out in the rain to shape artistically the clinging tendrils. They proved to be poison ivy, and two days later I was in a desperate state. Then it stormed again, and with the disorders that reigned within, the gloom of hope deferred gathered

over our rain-washed garden and hung wretchedly about our muddy door-steps.

When W. Braikup did appear one morning, he was a creature of remorse and good intentions. He did not appear brazenly, and try to put the blame on us, as is customary in such cases. He even did not shift the burden wholly upon the weather, as he might have done with some show of reason. He simply took off his hat deferentially and let the rain fall on his badly thatched, gambrel-shaped dome, while he craved our mercy and declared he was unfit to look us in the eye. He was through with his big job now, he said, and our work would move in a manner that would fairly take our breath away. I may say here that this was true. It took not only our breath, but our vocabulary, to keep

up with W. Braikup and his minions of mechanical machinations.

Not that I would be unduly harsh. In fact, I find that somewhere within me is a sympathetic corner, dedicated to the memory of W. Braikup. I believe that he was the victim of circumstance and unfaithful hirelings. I believe that no man of any imagination can combat for any length of time with the irresponsible, incompetent, and abandoned workmen to be had in and about New York City, without losing his health, or his moral force. W. Braikup retained his health; and when I remember the satisfactory manner with which he carried out my garret ideas, and how work really did move when he was personally in charge, I find that my corner of sympathy is much larger and a

good deal warmer than W. Braikup probably thinks, if, indeed, he ever thinks of me, now, at all.

Our hopes rose to the highest pitch. Saws and hammers were echoing once more, and lumber was being unloaded on the vacant lot. W. Braikup was personally in charge, and things moved, as he had promised. The garret was well-nigh complete in a few brief days, and I ordered the deadening felt, with which to cover the rafters and side-walls; also the Franklin stove, though, as we were verging upon warm weather, this would seem to have been an unnecessary outlay. Still, we were going to get things while we had the mood and money. We came up into the cleanly swept loft, which began to show its artistic possibilities, and, looking out the

new side window to the east, were glad to find a place apart from the paste-pot and step-ladder below stairs. We tried to be content and charitable, — to take things as they came, and be happy.

But now came another period of neglect and echoless silence. Another two weeks when workmen slouched in whistling, replied indifferently and even curtly to our questions, then, still whistling, sauntered away. Sometimes they gathered up tools which they had left in the cellar. We were getting desperate again, when two of them appeared together and set a row of studding on our new foundation, the first real progress in the way of an elevation. Our neighbors had displayed a friendly interest in our progress, and I was glad we could make a showing at last. But on the next day W.

Braikup himself appeared, and, after what seemed to me very mild reproof, administered to the miscreants of the day before, took down all the studding and reset it to accord more with the general plan and certain acknowledged principles of building. Then he set more studding and joists, and then came the mason again.

I had met this person only casually, during the construction of our foundation, but he was now to become so important a factor in my distempered days and disturbed nights, that I feel niggardly in not allowing him a chapter all to himself. I will do the best I can in the allotted space.

His name was Barney, a countryman of Adelia's, though even Adelia found little to defend in him. I am averse to epithet, but Barney was as iniquitous a lubber,



as malicious a lime-plastered liar as ever left a trail of mortar and mourning in his path. My vocabulary seems weak when I remember Barney. The murder instinct does not go mouthing adjectives and fashioning phraseology; and I find, even at this late day, that the old savagery, dormant within us all, with its old cry for blood, rises powerfully within me when I recall that sullen demon of blocked chimneys and defective flues. What I most desire to hear is that Barney has fallen from one of his chimneys, — a tall chimney, with no scaffolding to impede his earthward progress. I do not want him to kill himself. He would be getting off too easy, — much too easy, — unless, indeed, he could fall head first, inside, and, getting firmly stuck in some criminally cramped portion of the flue, could

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perish by lingering inches of well earned torture and remorse. On the whole, I think I should prefer that he would fall outside and break something — something important, and that could not be repaired. Perhaps the destruction of Barney's pipe would satisfy my thirst for revenge, provided it could not be mended or replaced. I do not often feel so violently about any one, but in my memory of Barney I find no corner of extenuation — no room for charity. I shall destroy Barney or his pipe, if either ever crosses my path again.

When we had got the foundation of our chimney up level with the lower joists, I brought out my plan, and showed it to him carefully. He regarded it with slight interest, and without comment. I saw presently that he did not un-

derstand my idea at all, and I called his attention to misplaced bricks. He showed no disposition to change them, and, when I became insistent, only volunteered to explain my plan to me from his point of view, which was certainly a new one, though not in accordance with my wishes. I said that I was satisfied with my original intention, and gently but firmly insisted that he move his bricks about to conform with my ideas. He did so in grim silence, and then displaced a lot more, in spite of my continuous murmur of protest and the constant display of my really beautiful plan.

I have wondered since why Barney did these things—why he could not have made some small effort to please me, so saving himself the necessity of a devilish revenge later on, and me this pub-

lic exposure of his turpitude. When he had reached the first cross layer of the fireplace, and I saw it sagging down on the steel supporting-bar, with no hope of its ever coming back to place again, I could stand it no longer, and went hastily in search of W. Braikup.

I found him crawling over the roof of a house he was building, — the new big job, I suppose, — and all the way back I denounced Barney in lurid terms. I repeated that I was building the attachment mainly to get the chimney, and that I wanted it right. I declared that Barney was a dumb-head and a botch, only fit to lay rough stone under a foreman's eye. I have taken these things back now. Barney was simply a villain, wholly unfit to lay anything except blight on the lives of innocent people.

When Braikup arrived he pulled Barney's work down, and, taking the trowel, laid the brick himself, in accordance with my ideas. As I have said, W. Braikup had imagination, and understood my plans. It was a triumph for me, and I got my fireplace to look somewhat as I had expected it would. Barney evinced little emotion — sullenly biding his time.

Above the mantel the flue was straight building until it reached the upper floor, where it made a bend around the second opening. I did not dream of absolute treachery on Barney's part, and left him to himself until he got above stairs. Here he showed an inclination to build the plain fireplace the only way that a plain fireplace can be built, and I continued to let him alone in the feeling that one may well be generous to the defeated.

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I did notice, once when I looked in, that there seemed to be a good deal of mortar in the lower turn, and mentioned the fact, adding that Braikup had guaranteed the chimney to draw, and that it didn't seem to me that so many lumps of mortar inside could be a good thing for the draught. He said that it would come out when the chimney was done—that they would hammer it out with an iron ball attached to a string. I admitted that this might be possible, but it seemed to me labor which might be avoided.

However, the chimney went on until it reached the top, reaching it several feet sooner than I could have wished, or than I believed would make it a successful conduit of smoke. I declared my conviction that a chimney ought to be able to see over the highest point

of a roof, to enable it to get a good breath of air from every direction, but as W. Braikup, in whose counsel I still had faith, assured me that it was of sufficient distance from the highest point to make this immaterial, and that the higher it was the easier it would blow over, I temporarily subsided on this point. I called his attention to certain bulgy or swollen appearances on the lower flat part, outside. He admitted that there did seem to be a certain unevenness there, but thought it wouldn't be noticed when the chimney was painted, which, on the whole, seemed more reasonable than Barney's assertion that it would all dry down even, or than the Little Woman's suggestion that perhaps these outward curvatures were to operate against the draught, and to keep the whole

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lower part of the chimney from being drawn up the flue.

We had built no fire in the chimney as yet, — the absence of hearth and the presence of shavings making the experiment hazardous, though I had more than once held bunches of lighted paper to the openings, with results that awakened but feeble enthusiasm as to the draught, — notwithstanding the fact that both Braikup and Barney and even the Little Woman assured me that this was hardly a fair test, owing to the dampness of the long flue, and to some other things which I have forgotten.

What I do recall is that from this time on I gave up all thought of anything like continuous work of my own. To attend carefully to the progress of our improvements, to see that the motley and





**"THEY WERE USUALLY 'LOOKING FOR THEIR  
TOOLS'"**

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meretricious workmen that now came and went did not altogether destroy and carry off all the rest of our house and contents, these duties were quite enough to put one able-bodied man under the sod and the dew before the end.

There were days when they worked and days when they did not. Sometimes they came for a part of a day, or even for a few minutes, to nail on a piece of siding, or to tear down something they had done the day before. At other times they dropped in merely to walk through the rest of the house, which they did at will, and with less regard for us than if we had been step-ladders or mantel ornaments. No room, no spot, no corner was free from their invasion. They were usually "looking for their tools," and, as one of the paper men missed some

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of his one day, and as I discovered that my own kit in the cellar was depleted, it would seem they had found better than we knew. I had reached a point by this time where my protest in a matter so slight as the loss of a few tools was but a feeble thing. I said that there were still some which had been overlooked, and that I would contribute these also, if this would aid in getting on with the work.

The paper man, however, was mad. I had never seen a man any madder than he was, standing on a step-ladder, with a long strip of room-moulding, which he had worked hard to fit into place, then suddenly making the discovery that some miscreant had carried off the means of affixing it there. For a time it seemed that our peaceful undertaking was to end in war and general destruction.

We did not mind. We had arrived at a point where we might have flung ourselves in the mêlée, and found relief in carnage and crimson oblivion. But somehow a truce was patched up, and the night came down on the usual desolation.

Almost imperceptibly, as moss covers a stone wall, so the siding and shingles grew over our attachment. It had been the agreement not to open the arch until everything was tightly enclosed, but one sombre afternoon, on the eve of the coldest May storm I have ever seen, when the new windows were only loosely boarded and the floor incomplete above, they took out those three north windows between, and for the next four days our destitution was complete.

## XVII.

*Gardens of May.*

**M**EANTIME, what of our garden. Far be it from me to overlook that which became our chief solace during this the season of our sorrow. It has had time to come up, now, and I must neglect it no longer.

The cold and continuous rains that followed our first planting were hardly what we had hoped for, but the warm suns that followed and baked the ground, also wakened to germination the tiny life-thoughts below, and before long we saw irregular flakes and slabs of crusted earth uptilting on the little graves — beds, I mean —

where the radish seeds were planted and the peas buried in rows twelve inches apart. As for the lettuce-beds, where we had sown broadcast the Iowa seed, it was all at once a collection of innumerable little circus tents. Under each of these were anywhere from ten to a dozen tiny salad beginnings, the heads of which, we had been assured, would "frequently measure twenty inches across." I calculated that if every one of those incipient salads attained a size of even ten inches, we would have enough to cover fifty-four acres of land, with an extra hundred or so of plants, for good measure. We began to recognize the error of our sowing. It is hard to cultivate the acquaintance, or to encourage the proper deportment, of young vegetables when you cannot get between the

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rows with a satisfactory hoe. I was obliged to avail myself of the miniature garden tools of the Precious Ones in order to properly reduce the incrustation of earthy matter about the radishes, while my fingers were the only implements that would serve in the tillage of the broadcast salad. It was tedious labor, and required care, for some of the earth slabs were so big that the little green Samsons beneath had all they could do to hold them up, without being hammered from above with even a toy hoe. I learned presently that it was better to pulverize the slabs during the early period of the baking process, before the brown earthenware stage had been reached. I did this, in some cases, even before the seeds had begun to shift for themselves, and usually with good results. I



wish I had done so with the onions. As it was, one single fragrant filament of green found its way through, and we were between a young-onionless garden and our vow to buy no vegetables. The result was the alternate surrender of conscience and appetite.

But most of our seeds came. Our lettuce-bed was presently a mass of green. Our radishes, encouraged by the cool, continuous rains, that bring joy and firmness to the radish heart, crowded and pushed in their six-inch rows, and were on the table a month from the day of planting.

Oh, what so beautiful as the crimson hue of the first tiny radishes from your own garden! Fresh, wet, and tender,—laid daintily on a pretty blue and white plate,—the dark green leaves forming an outward fringe. A

dip of salt, and one crisp, cool bite—a morsel like that goes far toward making any summer worth while. Adelia uttered fervent exclamations when she saw them. The Little Woman rejoiced because of her faith in the Iowa seeds. Ah, me! I wish our onions, too, had been of that brand!

When the days passed and they did not appear, I replanted, and we put out a few sets which a neighbor gave us. I also replanted the herbs. Perhaps Sage had not found thyme for Marjoram to be savory to Basil. At least, Basil was shy, while Marjoram was coy, and even thyme would make no progress in that unsavory bed. They did better on the second sowing, and their old-fashioned fragrance and flavors became as an odor of sanctity in our garden, and have filled the drawers of our old dress-

ers with the breath and memory of the past. A little of them go well in soups, too, and with baked fish and fowl — I must not forget that.

We planted other things, — a patch of beans, — a small bed of okra, — some more radishes, — some hills of cucumbers, water-melons, and canteloupes, and in one corner of our plot the hill of pumpkins, without which no garden is complete. We also put out six tomato-vines, and some pepper plants, which we bought one morning of an itinerant hothouse, and which I stayed out in the rain to plant, because I remembered having heard that things put out when it rains are sure to grow. The pepper plants I set along the fence, beyond the patch of corn, which the Little Woman and I had planted one very hot day, — she dropping the kernels and I cover-

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ing with the hoe, in the good old-fashioned way. It did not occur to me that the corn would presently shade the pepper plants and render them pale and unproductive. We shall set them along the other side, next year.

By this time our interest in the garden had become deep and absorbing. Indeed, we spent a good deal of our time there. It was impossible to live happily in the house, while from the garden we could still keep an eye on the progress of accidents within, and another on the persistent weed and unambitious Brussels sprout. When in town, I found that places near the ferry, where garden implements and seeds and potted plants are sold, had acquired for me a new fascination, that more than once resulted in a later train. Armloads of tools, rhubarb, horse-

radish, and castor-oil plants, — the last named being good for the three m's — moles, malaria, and mosquitoes, — were the price of these delays. The tools we needed. The plants were presently growing in such odd corners of our garden as were still unoccupied.

The question of space began to be a rather serious problem. Now and then we could still discover a tiny vacancy, though in planting some zinnias and cockscombs I tramped down two bean bushes, while in excavating for some hills of potatoes I dug up certain cucumber seeds previously planted. I wish now I had dug them all up. Cucumbers are a good thing, but no garden of such space limitations is big enough to hold two families, where one of them is of the cucumber and the other of the canteloupe faction.

As I say, we were confronted with the need of space. We dug up some of our paths, at last, and in one of them I planted marigolds — a paper of the Iowa seeds; and I pause here to say that whatever regrets I may have had concerning lost paths, I have never begrudged the one devoted to the Little Woman's marigolds.

Things grew — it was a growing year. I have never seen weeds do better anywhere than right there in our garden. I would not have believed that you could raise so many on a spot of that size. They did not confine themselves to rows of from six to eight inches apart, but were willing to put up with any odd corner that I happened to overlook for an hour or two. The middle of the ash-strewn, hard-baked granitoid path was good enough for them, and the

fact that we walked on them daily and slashed at them with anything that came handy did not seem to discourage them or to retard their progress. Even after they were cut off with the hoe they would keep right on growing, while on the other hand, a bean or two, that I accidentally cut a little, died under treatment. Nature made weeds for something, I suppose, and, whatever it was, she made them of rather better material than she used for a good many other things of more evident purpose. I abandoned the hoe at length as a method of weed culture, and attended to this part of our crop with my hands. It was hot work, but it brought root and all, and when I had tossed them into a pile to become the compost of the future, they were at least temporarily restrained. Once, when I

was obliged to go away for a few days — on business, though the Little Woman still claims I went to get out of the muss — I found on my return that the weeds all appeared to have escaped from the compost pile and got back into their old places again, full-grown and more lusty than ever.

It needed rather more than the “little real effort each day” we had counted on, to keep our garden properly ordered during this season of many suns and showers. As for the Precious Ones, their gardens had been overwhelmed, obliterated and replanted. They were nevertheless quite happy, — the Precious Ones, — for they rejoiced in the companionship and loitering labors of even the most reprehensible of our workmen. What a blessing that they kept well during that memorable season!



They raced and rioted with their many and motley companions, and, like the corn and castor-beans and tomato-vines, grew and waxed strong through sun and shower. With them, and with our six rows of golden wax beans, we found happiness when the day shone fair, even when all was lime-dust and dismay within.

## XVIII.

*A Corner in Denims.*

**A**S room after room began to be habitable, we eagerly put them to rights for occupancy. The question of floor covering now confronted us. We felt that we did not want anything like carpets under our rugs, even had we been able to afford them. A plain wool filling would have been acceptable, but this also meant considerable outlay. Things already were costing a pretty sum, and they were likely to cost still more. Our bare floors were oiled, but they were not of the best material, and hardly satisfactory.

I had a friend who had used

denim as a basis for rugs, with pleasing effect. We decided to try denim, beginning in my attic and continuing downward, if the result proved encouraging.

Green being our prevailing tint, I said I would have it there, too, on the floor, and that it would go well with the gray deadening felt, which, by the way, we had already tacked over the rafters and side-walls.

I may say in passing that putting on deadening felt in a garret, on a hot day, — fitting and matching it about the turns and corners, — is not what is popularly known as a “picnic,” even with all the windows open, and a little woman to help with the long strips. It seemed cool enough up there when we sat down to rest, but, standing on a chair, with one hand holding up a long, fuzzy length of wobbly

stuff that insists on pulling out the carefully thumb-pressed tack and flapping down in your face just as you are getting ready to nail home, and with your mouth full of yet more tacks, and your head tipped back to the extreme limit of neck angle, the question of heat is not always one of temperature. Now and then I made observations that might have started a conflagration, had they been less futile. We became more adept with practice. I got so I could work all day with my mouth full of tacks, and could even criticize the Little Woman's method of holding, or swear when I pounded my finger, sufficiently well for her to tell the difference in these things, which had been possible in the beginning only from my general attitude, and from the vigor with which I

usually dropped the hammer after the second item.

The Little Woman helped me with the denim, too. I cut it into proper lengths, and she ran it together on the sewing-machine, which we had hauled from under tarpaulins for that purpose. The amount needed had been something less than a bolt, but our merchant had made us a special figure on the latter quantity, and we agreed that green denim was always handy to have for curtains and the like, even if we did not continue the idea on the floors below.

We acquired some education in sewing the denim. The Little Woman informed me that in future she would baste it beforehand, though I did not realize the importance of her remark at the time. The force of it came to me

when we got to stretching the stuff, trying to make it cover the floor for which it was intended. It seems that in sewing it without basting, one edge is apt to "take up" a little, and so not come out even at the ends. With an economy inherited from Puritan ancestors, I had cut close, with the result, now, that more than one strip was something like a foot shorter than the floor length to be covered, while here and there were what looked like ruffled places that must all be pulled smooth.

Denim is stretchy stuff, but to pull out those ruffles and gain one foot in thirty is no light thing, and we got down on the deadening felt, which I had put underneath as well as overhead, and pulled and clawed and tacked and denounced each other for the better part of two days. Here and there,

in the side walls, I had left openings, for storage conveniences — these to be covered later with curtains. They became now our salvation. We could get in them and pull. We established these pulling-stations at different points along the line, adding one or two others where the distance was long and weary between.

Altogether it was quite an experience. I pounded my thumb over a hundred times, and once I nailed it firmly to the floor. Now and then we found some of the tacks I had spilled during moments of previous effort. Sometimes we found them with our knees or our elbows. Even when we saw them, they were usually under the denim, and this made it necessary to take up that portion again, or to work them across a wide expanse of green by a tedious

sliding process that frequently ended in failure.

The stretching became harder as we neared the end. The last corner will not be easily forgotten by either of us. I have always heard of "hot corners" on the red field of battle. I never before quite realized what was meant, or why so many of them have passed into history. It takes experience to bring home a thing like that. The Little Woman and I made a noble fight in our hot corner on the green field of denim. She got down flat and pushed, while I got under the window-seat that came just there, and pulled and groaned and tacked and made appropriate remarks that seemed to encourage us both. When it was all over at last, we were limp and lame and punctured, but triumphant.

The Little Woman dragged me



out from under the bench, and we surveyed our work with pride. The few wrinkles and "lap-overs" in the last corner would be covered by a couch that was to go there. The rest of the floor was smooth and soft and greenly beautiful. We realized now what my garret was to be, and agreed that it was the best place in the house.

It was, indeed, pleasant, when we had got out all the old traps that we were ready to discard elsewhere and put them up there. Threadbare rugs and mended furniture were at a disadvantage among better things, but they seemed to belong up there, and my old fishing-boots and baskets and camping-pans, — an old birch broom I once picked up in Newfoundland for two cents, an old rush wine-hamper I once fished up from the bottom of the sea, — all

the old odds and ends fell into place, while some India print curtains and pillows here and there, and the red ladder leading to the skylight above, gave touches of color that now, with my Franklin stove, lend cosy comfort and cheer to winter days. I have recently got hold of a big old fish-net, which I have stretched and looped over one side of the wall and the sloping ceiling above. It is just the thing with the gray deadening felt.

People usually want to stay in my garret, once they get here. They are willing to roam no farther, even if they could. It is still and restful, and as I turn from my writing to look out over the brown wood and faded, far-lying fields, then back to the bright open fire within, and, listening, hear the soft murmur overhead of

the rain that is just beginning, I feel that too few of us have been appreciating our garrets, or putting them to the best use.

Our success with the floor covering above stairs had made us enthusiastic on the subject of denims. We resolved that in the liberal use of denims there was a vast economy, and decided to "denimize" throughout. Interviewing our merchant, I learned that he carried three solid colors — green, red, and a rather light blue. The red we thought would do for the parlor, and the blue for the bedrooms, where we were to have pretty striped paper with blue bands and small twining roses. We didn't need a bolt of each, but it was cheaper that way, and we had reached a point by this time where denim seemed the proper thing in the way of fabric for all human

needs. We resolved that remnants of any color would make beautiful covers and curtains, as well as serviceable summer raiment for the Little Woman and the Precious Ones.

I said that I could imagine nothing more gratifying than the harmony in denims which would result from a green floor basis and a red couch, with pillows of all three colors, among which might be discovered the Little Woman and Precious Ones, as well as Adelia and the Tiny Small One, each and all in the various combinations pleasingly arrayed. We would originate the idea of this denim corner, and household journals throughout the land would hail us as benefactors.

Adelia and I laid the denim in the library, and our acquaintance ripened in the process. There was

less pulling and exhaustion this time, for the Little Woman had applied her education in the matter of stitching, and put in fewer ruffles, while I had cut more liberally, and had learned to stretch toward no corner in particular, but gradually toward all the corners, as painters stretch canvas. Still, you can't sweat and tug and tack half a day with a person, and pull at the piece she's lying on, and have her haul at the piece you're lying on, without getting more or less sociable, not to say familiar.

I had wondered sometimes, when I had found time to wonder at anything these strenuous days, why it was that Adelia had come to us. I did not know but that she might be the Duchess of Dublin in disguise, and I wanted to stand well with her when she resumed her rank and title. I said to her that

it probably seemed a bit strange that I should perform so much menial labor, and so little of anything else, but that continuous brain work had been too much for me, and I was doing this for my health. Then Adelia confided to me that she, also, had come to the country for her health, and we discovered presently that we knew a good many of the same people, as always happens in companionable talk like that.

This was pleasant enough, but it had its drawbacks. I foresaw that Adelia would be going back to town one of these days, and would doubtless attach herself to some one of her former patrons. I would not mind her telling how we had laid denim together. Laying denim is distinctly a clean and honorable employment, but there had been certain things connected

with my domestic duties, during a brief period when the Little Woman and Adelia had been coincidentally ill, that I hoped she might forget.

We decided against any further use of denim in the library. After all, there might be such a thing as overdoing a good idea. We would "denimize" the bedroom and parlor floors as planned, and in the making of certain hangings and cushions elsewhere—all of which I may say we did, and with pleasing results.

But the couches, the Little Woman, and the Precious Ones were spared.

## XIX.

*The Trail of the Builder.*

THERE came now a period of odds and ends, — small jobs that were still necessary to complete our general undertaking, and so rid us of the destroyers of our peace.

Mechanics still came and went, and with each bit completed they appeared to destroy something else — something which required still other mechanics, and yet further destruction, to restore and replace. We agreed at length that if we had any house left when they were done with us we would be lucky. Then came the feeling that they would never be done with us. It



was a curse laid upon us for our ambition — the lifelong punishment of pride. We rebelled somewhat at this thought. The punishment seemed so disproportionate to our ambition.

We dispensed with any consideration as to their feelings, or their good intentions. We decided that they had none of either. We condemned them openly when they were with us. When they were not, we gave them absent treatment.

At times we became hysterical, and laughed. It was the only thing left — every other emotion was used up. Barney splashed and stained our wainscoting with acid and cement when he washed down our brickwork and put in our Portland hearth. Instead of slaying him, as we were justified in doing, we merely laughed at the grotesqueness of what we con-

ceived to be Barney's finishing touch.

A blacksmith came from the city one day to put the ironwork on our mantel — the wrought frames, and the hood. He loosened a good deal of the brickwork, and dug deeply into Barney's Portland hearth. When I came up-stairs, the Little Woman looked at me questioningly.

"Well," she ventured.

I dropped into a chair.

"He's gone," I said.

"Good job?"

"Nope, botch — as usual."

"I thought as much."

"Why so?"

"Well, I heard you laughing."

Poor Little Woman! There had been a time when the echo of my laugh had meant life, and renewed joy. Now, it meant only some new form of disaster and despair.

Yet, somehow, matters did progress. The painters and paper men vacated room after room, and, after cleaning them with a rake, and broom, and mop, — the rooms, of course, — we began to have portions of the house to call our own. Then I got another mason, a genuine mason, this time, — Heaven creates such a one occasionally, — to repair my brickwork, and restore Barney's ruined hearth. He put a brick arch beneath the hearth, this time, to prevent the conflagration Barney had evidently foreseen. Then between us we straightened and properly reset the blacksmithing. Our mantel was complete at last. It was not a bad job, considering the number of workmen, and it really bore a good deal of resemblance to my plan.

In the room above, a door and a

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window were still lacking. The window was boarded. The door opened into the apartment occupied for the present by the Little Woman and the Tiny Small One. It was no great matter during pleasant weather, but when rain came it was damp and plasterly and disagreeable. The cold storm that always comes in August found both the door and our contractor still unhung. The former was put in place next day — also the final window. Then came the painters once more, — to tint the brickwork a dull red, to paint the woodwork and dining-room floor a rich deep olive to harmonize with the walls, — to depart at last with their ladders and their cans, — and, behold, we were rid of paint, paste, plaster, and the pushers of planes. It had been April when they had appeared in our midst —

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it was late August when we saw them depart. Their "ten days," with husbandry and usufruct, had become even as a hundred. Wonderful indeed are the works and ways of the builder!

We awoke to a sense of stillness and desertion. Now that they were gone, we missed them. We also missed other things. As Adelia put it, we were all the time finding new things that we missed. Perhaps our carpenters will do better on their next job. They have more and better tools.

I have said that we were rid of them. I must not be taken too literally. The workmen and their ladders were gone, but the curses lingered. W. Braikup and Barney are not to be dismissed so lightly.

The former called one morning before I was dressed, and seemed to be in a desperate hurry. The

final payment on the work was not yet due, and was not to be made until our chimney had been proven a success under various conditions of wind and temperature. I still had misgivings as to its drawing powers. We had built the attachment for the sake of that chimney. If it did not draw, our whole turbulent summer was a failure. I had declared repeatedly to W. Braikup that I would not have a smoky chimney for a thousand dollars! He had assured me as frequently that he would not supply me with one for double that amount. Our figures seemed all right enough at the time. Reflecting on them now, they appear to have been too liberal.

I was surprised at W. Braikup's early call. I was still more astonished when I learned that he wished a settlement. Not that he

was aggressive, — W. Braikup was never that, — he was humble and beseeching. He had a number of things to pay on the 1st, — bills for material and the like, — the amount I owed him was sorely needed. In the matter of the chimney, I could hold back what I thought was right — he would satisfy me on the chimney if he had to take it down brick by brick, and rebuild it from the ground.

I turned cold at the thought, and asked him what amount would answer for present needs. Then he made me a startling proposition. He realized, he said, what trouble he had made us. If I would give him a cheque for the bill; less forty dollars, he would not only give me a receipt in full, but he would also insure the chimney to draw, — so great was his need, — so complete his faith in the flue as constructed.

There was an eagerness in his manner that made me sorry for him. He had the reputation of being well-meaning and honest.

"Poor fellow!" I thought, "he is pressed for means. Here is my chance to be forgiving and philanthropic — also to make forty dollars." I hastily drew the cheque, took his receipt and guaranty, and he was gone. The weather next morning being cool and damp, I decided to try the chimney under these conditions, forthwith. I would hurry down, put the crane and gipsy kettle in place, build a carefully constructed fire, and have a bright blaze going when the Little Woman and Precious Ones came in to breakfast.

How well I remember that morning! The crane hung, the kettle swung, the fire lit. The red flame leaped at the dry kindling.



The merry crackle became as music. The smoke — the smoke started bravely up the chimney — seemed to hesitate — started again — hesitated — halted — peered at me questioningly from under the hood — wavered aimlessly from side to side — writhed and twisted in its desire to escape properly — made one more final, futile effort, and poured out into the room!

In all my life I have never seen so much smoke from one small fire. Perhaps some of the wood was damp — I don't know. I know that in less than a minute there were rings and wreaths and layers and serpentine forms above and about me — that my eyes were blinded and my lungs filled. The family entered just then, to find me madly opening and closing windows in a wild effort to find

some place where my menagerie could make its exit.

It was of no use. The wind seemed to blow from all directions at once. The snakes and wreaths and things that went out of one window came in at another. Some of them went clear around the house to get in again, while the few that had really found their way up the chimney joined in the procession. Even smoke from our neighbors' chimneys came over to mingle with the excitement, and take a look at our new dining-room.

The Little Woman says I went all to pieces. That when the Precious Ones ran about crying and getting in my way between windows, I raged, and declared they didn't draw and never would draw, and that I would get even with Braikup if I had to kill him

dead, and then pay a fine of a million dollars. The Little Woman is noted for her truthfulness, but I think her memory is at fault. I may have said that the Precious Ones didn't draw, and never would, and that I would destroy Braikup; but not at so great a cost. What I do remember, is that, in the midst of all, I seized a stray bit of paper from the mantel, intending to brighten the flame, that had died down, and increased the quantity of smoke. There was some writing on the paper, and I hesitated, for I am in the habit of making valuable notes on scraps like that, and sometimes they turn up in just such places. My half-blind vision recognized my own writing, and through a wreath of smoke the words—words long before set down for the Little Woman:

"I will go softly — softly, all my days."

An hour later we learned the worst. The man who had done our tinwork came, and he had that tired look on his face. Had we settled with Braikup? was the burden of his plaint.

"I have," I said. "I paid him yesterday morning, and I'm sorry for it. Our chimney doesn't draw, and he's got to fix it, as guaranteed. I'll go after him, to-day."

"You won't find him."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"He's gone. Left the country. Collected all he could get, and skipped — owin' me, an' everybody."

I knew by the way he said it that it was true. Subconsciously, too, I had felt that something more was about to happen. That was it. Unskilled and unfaithful work-

men had triumphed. W. Braikup had succumbed at last, leaving general wreckage behind. His name was no longer inappropriate.

Other visitors followed. We learned from them certain details as to our contractor's departure. He had taken a good deal of money; also, in the haste and darkness of his departure, the wrong wife, by mistake. At least, it was supposed to have been by mistake. Having once seen her, it was not thought possible that he could have taken her by intention.

Our visitors also put attachments on our house. In two short hours these men had put more attachments on our dining-room than by any of their former methods they would have been able to put on in the same number of years. This annoyed and distressed us. We had paid once—paid with tor-

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ture and tears and carefully drawn cheques. Besides, our chimney did not draw, and most of our work seemed a failure. It was unjust that we should be asked to pay again. These men had known and trusted Braikup a number of years. They had not known or trusted us. They had given us no hint of suspicion. There had been no suspicion. I said that if I had to pay again I would make good the million dollar fine proposition, as relating to the destruction of W. Braikup.

Fortunately for us, and for Braikup, this violence was avoided. The attachments fell away like shadows, in the light of the fact that we had paid innocently—no mistrust of our contractor having developed in any quarter until it was found that he had disappeared. Our

receipt was dated twenty-four hours previous to this, and we were free, but it seemed a narrow escape. In some States we should have had to pay again.

Having now forty dollars for experiments, I got my genuine mason again, and we built the chimney higher, until it topped the roof by at least a foot. It did a little better then, but it was not as yet a thing of joy. On damp mornings we built the fire small and carefully, and, sitting before it, tried to imagine that it was not really smoking, but only giving us the nice woody smell that always came from open fires. Then, when our eyes were half put out by this pleasure, we became solemn and dismal in the thought that all our plans and our labors had not brought us the thing that we cared for most.

I grew thinner daily, and my nights were haunted by dreams of smoke-filled rooms and congested flues. It was one of these dreams that led to further experiment. My mason had dropped the regulation iron ball through our flue, and knocked out a lot of mortar, all of which had helped, but not enough. His opinion was that the flue itself was not large enough for the opening below. I did not agree with him. I held that so long a flue ought to carry the draught from an opening of ten times its size in square inches, and that somewhere there was an obstruction which the iron ball did not dislodge. After a night of vivid dreams I awoke with this as a conviction, and with a remedy.

Once more I sent for my mason, and, while waiting for him, I prepared the patent obstruction-



finder, revealed to me in my dream. I gathered a round smooth cobble for weight. I padded it with excelsior for size, and covered the whole with a piece of bagging, thus making a round, heavy, yielding ball, full eight inches in diameter. To this I attached the clothes-line, and when my assistant arrived we went up the ladders together.

I am not fond of climbing ladders, or of clinging to the top of tall chimneys in a gale of wind. But my desperation gave me courage. We let down the soft heavy ball. It went down, down, and my heart with it. If it went through, the mason was right, and the flue was too small. The chimney would have to come down, brick by brick, as Braikup had suggested. Down — and still down — then, suddenly, it stopped!

Stopped still and hard! We lifted the rope and let it drop. We hammered the weight up and down. Yielding as it was, it would go no farther. Pulling the ball up and letting it down on the outside, we could see exactly where the obstruction lay. It was where the flue made the upper bend around the second-floor fireplace. The sullen Barney had not failed in his revenge. Yet I could have shed tears of joy — not because the vindictive fellow had cramped our chimney, but because the trouble *was* that, and the terrible prospect of rebuilding perhaps averted.

Hastily we descended. Then, erecting a ladder below, my mason performed a skilful surgical operation on our chimney — two, in fact, for the flue was cramped on the lower turn also. The flue at these points was a trifle over three

inches across — just large enough to let the regulation ball pass. Barney had constructed his revenge with more skill than any other portion of his work.

Three hours later the impediment had been removed and the wounds carefully closed. We didn't need a fire that day, but we had it. We piled on wet paper and damp wood to make smoke — the smoke went where it belonged, and the wind blew it where it listed.

The Precious Ones danced and fed scraps of paper to the leaping flames. Adelia came in to look and wonder. The Little Woman kissed me, and thanked God!

## XX.

*The Marigold Path.*

**B**UT I wish you might have seen our August garden!

There was never such a season for things to grow. The days gave us alternate sun and shower, and our prodigal sowing came presently to riotous harvest. Deep or surface planting did not matter, nor whether the moon was in its light or dark period. Iowa seeds, Ohio seeds, or Long Island seeds from our grocers — after that first early sowing, everything went — came, I mean — popped out of the ground as soon as put into it, almost overnight, sometimes. Flowers, vegetables, and melons,

they grew and they grew, — narrowing and covering the spaces between, — branching and bushing and festooning, — until paths were lost and stepping-places forgotten.

We had wanted an old-fashioned tangled garden. We had almost overdone the thing, for, with our economy in the matter of space, and our generosity in the matter of seed, we had achieved a jungle. But it was a fair and fruitful jungle, and in it we found a compensation for many ills.

When we went down into it with a basket, we hardly knew where to begin gathering, and, likewise, I hardly know where to begin to tell of it. Perhaps I should start with the tall row of wild Western sunflowers on the lower side. The seed of these had been sent to us

from that State to which they have given their name, and they never grew taller or sturdier, or bloomed more prodigally on their native plains than they did along our garden-side. The flowers were small, like the English variety, but often there were as many as a hundred or more to the stalk. Our stalks were about fifteen feet tall, and at blooming-time they formed a wonderful wall of gold. Nothing could be more beautiful behind a garden, or require less cultivation.

Perhaps our corn is next in importance. At least, it was next in size, and occupied more space than any other crop. The forty hills which we had planted on that hot May morning yielded no less than ten dozen beautiful Country Gentlemen's ears — I mean, of course, ears of the Country Gentleman variety. That doesn't sound quite



"I ALSO SAW IT BROUGHT STEAMING TO THE TABLE"

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right, either. What I want to say is that our corn was of the variety known as the Country Gentleman; also, that from our forty hills we gathered ten dozen ears; and, furthermore, that if said corn was not sweeter and more tender than any corn ever produced before, then my testimony on the witness-stand is of no value, so far as agricultural matters are concerned. I hoed that corn, and picked it, and husked it, and saw it through the kitchen. I also saw it brought steaming to the table. I know that it was our corn, and that it was the best corn ever raised. I said so at the time. Then the Little Woman said so. Then the Precious Ones said so. Then Adelia said so. Then the Tiny Small One whooped and fanned the air with her fists and tried to say so, too. We are a truthful fam-

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ily. You cannot get better testimony than that. We had another row of corn, in the little upper garden of the year before. It was pop-corn, and it yielded fifty ears of the "poppiest pop-corn that papa ever popped." The Precious Ones said that.

Beans seem to come next to corn. I will speak of our beans. Yet I hesitate, and a feeling of awe that is almost sadness comes over me when I approach so vast and venerable a subject, and recall the lavish succulence that overflowed from garden to basket and from basket to table until the Precious Ones rebelled at so much luxury, and secretly in my soul I wished that I might never taste, see, or hear of beans again.

It was distinctly a bean year — such a year as Jack must have known when his famous stalk grew

up and up to a world above the sky. We did not have that variety. Ours were the Golden Wax and Green Abundance, and the magic of their growth was in their yield. They began in June and never stopped. Cold beans, hot beans, pickled beans — beans for dinner, beans for supper, beans even for breakfast. It was regarded as disloyalty, even perfidy, to refuse them, until the Precious Ones, who didn't know the difference between disloyalty and dismay, expressed a distinct disapproval of beans.

It was a signal for general revolt, and we called on the neighbors for help. At first we picked them, — the beans, of course, — the neighbors, too, for that matter, and distributed baskets here and there among those who had supplied us with tools and catalogues and good advice. Then we issued a

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general order that those who would might come and help themselves. In the midst of our be(a)neficence, we even contemplated putting up a sign, such as is sometimes seen where excavations are in progress. Only that our sign, instead of offering free dirt, would have read:

<b>FREE BEANS</b>
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I could continue indefinitely this voluminous subject, but there is much else that demands attention. I will make mention of our okra.

The taste for this vegetable must be acquired. People do not care for the pale green mucilaginous pods at first sight, but, during a long-ago residence in the Mississippi back country, where okra is a staple article of diet, — almost the only one, sometimes, — I had

achieved the okra habit to the extent of making a vow that if ever I planted a garden of my own I should have okra. I had, therefore, put in two very short rows for my own use. These I had tended with care.

When the first few delicious pods came along, the Little Woman regarded the dish doubtfully. Then she commented in a manner that would suggest the possibility of our having made better use of even that tiny bit of our precious ground. When I prevailed upon her to taste one of the tender, uninviting-looking delights, her opinion for the moment was unchanged. But the okra habit is insidious. The next time we had it she ventured another taste. The third time, she took a whole pod. Then she was lost. After that, I had to get to the table

early, and within easy reach of the okra dish, to get a fair division. Next year we are going to plant more okra, so that the Precious Ones may be encouraged to taste and grow fond of this delectable and nutritious blessing.

We were rich in salads. "Nine new things to eat raw," one of our choicest combinations, flourished. The broadcast bed of lettuce became a green rosette of inexhaustible freshness, while the escarole came generously, and, even after once cut off, kept on coming, sweeter and more tender than ever. Radishes are usually a vegetable of early spring, becoming all pith and vanity with the warm dry days of summer. During this season of showers and cool nights, they retained all the crisp genuineness of character that had won our earlier approval. Our radish-bed, into

which, through the advice of our neighbor across the fence, we dropped two seeds wherever we took out one radish, remained radiant the season through. The parsley, which always takes its time about coming, and in getting a fair start after it does come, was by August so thick and strong that it would have made a hiding-place for a rabbit, provided the rabbit was of a small breed and would keep his ears down. Then there were the tomato-vines, set out along the fence and partly lost in the sunflowers, but big enough and prolific enough in all conscience, and the poor pepper-plants, that were overshadowed and lost behind the corn. We only got two peppers from them, but they were very good peppers, and taught us a lesson for next year.

It is a wonder that more things

were not lost, for we had planted without much regard as to sizes, and with no thought of such exuberant growth. We had to crawl through some things to get to others. The corn was like a cane-brake, through which I found one day a curious tunnel-like trail, as of some sizable creature. I followed it in its mazy wanderings, and, behold, it led back to the compost-pile by the fence, where the Precious Ones had established a "house," — a wonderfully secluded habitation, shut in by walls of green, and topped by a roof of blue and gold, — the sky of summer, and the sunflowers of the West. In one corner was a little peach-tree, two small dry limbs of which made excellent "hang-up things" for their dolls' apparel and household utensils. The dwellings of men were but a



few rods distant, but in that little house on the compost-pile they might have been as many leagues, while the voices of unsuspecting ones without — giants, maybe, and ogres—came mysteriously through whispering walls and tapestries of green.

Dear heart, I thought, here, while we toil and worry over ever so small an addition to our abiding-place, Nature has provided a residence beyond the skill of human hands! No noise, no fuss, no unskilled and unfaithful workmen! Silently by day and night the harmony of perfect toil goes on, and lo, one day the corn is in tassel, the sunflowers break into blossom. Come, now, fairy-folk, birds, and Precious Ones! Your house is ready—the key is in your hands! Come, and stand not on the order of your coming! For the

sun swings to the south, and the day hastens when the walls of green must wither, and the roof of gold grow dim. Haste to the Happy House of Summer-time, while the day is fair and the birds give welcome!

Oh, house upon the compost-pile, — with wall of green and roof of gold, — with glories fair and manifold, enduring such a little while!

A habitation frail and small, where childhood's little day abides — of that deep bosom which provides, at last, a haven for us all.

I must do something for this habit of digression. I grow worse as I get older. By the time I am fifty I shall be trying to write poetry.

There were two things that we could not raise — Brussels sprouts and a sun-dial. The former only

gave happiness to certain ants and other insects, of which there were quantities that damp season. Two quarts of inferior buds, worth perhaps twenty cents, could hardly be called a successful result from something like fifty well cultured plants. We shall buy sprouts another year. They come late, anyway, when our vow as to marketing shall have expired. The sun-dial we did not plant. The first cost was rather greater than we had thought. Besides, the spot intended for it was soon lost in a maze of vines and foliage. We have it to look forward to, and, once planted, it will mark the shining hours for all time.

In the little upper garden our cantaloupes had taken possession of most of the surface area, and adjacent paths. Long runners of yellow blossom and incipient

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Rocky Fords pushed out in every direction, and became a subject of daily comment and discussion. Their growth was a beneficent joy to us. Each morning we picked our way through the tangle of dewy vines, comparing sizes of those of the day before, forecasting the future of each, and so treading the melon path of peace. Our grief came when we found that their flavor partook of the adjoining cucumbers and intermingled pumpkins. It was another lesson. Our pumpkins will be planted far away next year, — our cucumbers still farther, — they will be planted by other people.

But I must not pass our pumpkin-vine with only this grudging and half-condemnatory word. It deserves more than that, if only for its aggressive enterprise. It began quietly enough in what then

seemed a remote corner. We were rather pleased when it sent one long arm across several beds of other things to renew acquaintance with its old time-honored neighbor, the corn, and we were only vaguely uneasy when another crept down the melon path and through our division fence. But when it sent out a dozen more tentacles, and began to lay violent hold on everything in reach, to lop over the hedge and start pumpkins on our neighbor's property, to climb up the morning-glory strings and look in the kitchen windows, to watch its chance for getting into the cellar,—perhaps to save us the trouble of harvest,—to beat at the back screen door for admission, and to ascend the new arbor with the evident intention of entering up-stairs, we thought it about time

to call a meeting and adopt resolutions.

But it would take something more than resolutions to restrain that green-armed octopus that so silently through the hours of day and dark had laid its mastery upon us. It was like a vicious habit, or certain aggressive combinations of capital. A lantern slide photograph of it would have been worth a good deal of money to a temperance lecturer, and perhaps even more to an anti-trust orator. It found its way into the dreams of our Elder Hope, who knows fairy stories, and became a great green dragon, with long clinging tentacles and numerous knobs of gold.

No spot was immune. Over the fence, under the fence, through the fence — pumpkins in the corn, pumpkins hanging in the hedge, a great pumpkin that grew like a

magic golden throne in the little house on the compost pile. We discussed and resolved, and then, remembering that even certain corporations may be blessings in disguise, we surrendered to the Trust of the Golden Pumpkin.

With the exception of the sunflowers, I have avoided mentioning our floral culture until the last. I have done so purposely — not because they were unimportant, but because in our garden they were really the embroideries and decorations of the feast — the desert that follows and gives flavor and luxury to the whole.

They were mostly of the old-fashioned sorts — zinnias, cockscombs, pinks, pansies, and asters. Wherever there was a bit of border, or an open place at the end of a row, we dropped them in; and they grew and flourished, and,

like the thyme and marjoram, filled our garden with old-time friendliness and welcome. Our morning-glories clung and clustered about our gateway, as we had planned, festooning both sides until we had to push our way between. By the kitchen, too, and by the dining-room they flourished, notwithstanding the tramping painters and the ruthless carpenters. Fresh and lovely — each morning a new glory of pink and white and purple — they came nodding at our windows, while their broad green leaves shut out the midday sun.

A bunch of black-eyed susans grew at one corner of the house, — having somehow strayed in from the fields to bloom and gladden us the season through, — and at another corner grew our hollyhocks, beautiful single ones — of



which we had obtained roots, in order to have blooms the first year. They stretched out a little way along the garden fence, and their tall spikes gratified us as we saw them waving welcome to the morning, or ranked in stately order against the evening sky.

But there was something that we thought more radiant even than these. It was our marigold path. Such a splendor of gold in every shade — from light lemon to deep lustrous brown — as resulted from the Little Woman's single packet of "mixed varieties" I have never seen, or even anybody who claimed *he* had seen, either. The blooming seemed late. We began to dread disappointment, and to wish we had our lost path back. Then a bud showed here and there. Then a lot of buds. Then an open flower or two. Then a few more, and

then, suddenly, there came such a burst of marigold glory as must fill those fair gardens beyond the sun.

And this remained to us. Long after the recreant Braikup and his meretricious men had become but as sombre pages of a summer's history — long after the corn was brown and withered, the sun-flowers faded, and the little house by the peach-tree was open to the view of every passer: even after the frost had laid its blight on the too presumptuous pumpkin, their golden splendor lingered. From it daily we filled our vases, our jars, and our jardinières, and put by all unhappy memories in the light of the marigold path.

## XXI.

### *Pussum's Wife et Al.*

**B**UT I have neglected our faithful Pussum. The second great epoch in his career seems worth recording.

Somehow we never connected Pussum with romance. He was so stately and reserved in his treatment of his neighbors. Even when we saw him considering with vague interest the slender black and white cat who occupied the cellar of the vacant house next door, we did not regard the matter as more than a casual acquaintanceship. Anyhow, being well into our building and gardening, we were too busy to take more than

a passing interest in Pussum's affairs.

On the whole, it seemed to be a rather hard summer for Pussum. His favorite corners were disordered, his favorite cushions tumbled and upset. Less than this has driven more than one bachelor to domesticity, and, perhaps, after all, we were to blame.

When the house was settled at last, he returned much as usual, and presently fell into disfavor, through a persistence in occupying a newly and bluely upholstered chair, which we were trying to keep handsome and free from hairs. Repeated eviction and dire threats were of no avail. Pussum slept in the chair whenever it stood upright, and protested when it was made uninhabitable with a book, or when its angle made rest a matter of discomfort and peril.

It was this latter unkindness on our part that resulted in disaster to the chair, and in deep disgrace on the part of Pussum. I suppose I tipped the chair a little too suddenly, and Pussum, being dreaming, perhaps, thought he was falling over a precipice. At all events, he clawed and clung desperately, with the result that there were two long slits in the blue fabric, that were as wounds in our hearts. When he was finally captured and banished, I said that this was the end. At sunrise he should die. It was simply a question whether I would tie our little feline brother to a tree and use him for target practice, or take him down cellar and quietly remove his head with my new saw.

On the whole, I preferred the saw, but the Precious Ones became violent at mention of either

method. They were for overlooking the whole matter, and declared that nothing should harm a hair of their "darling cat." Still I was unforgiving, and the next forenoon, which was sunny and Sunday, when I saw him blinking at me from the steps, while I filled some vases from the marigold path, I was indifferent and cool in my manner toward him.

Then presently something was rubbing against my leg and purring. I was surprised at this — it was not Pussum's way. Neither was it Pussum, for when I looked down I saw that it was the slender, and hitherto wild, black and white cat from the vacant cellar, next door.

"Well," I said, "what does this mean? What do *you* want?"

The black and white cat looked

up pleadingly, and continued to rub and purr.

"No, go away," I growled, "we do not want you. We've got one cat too many, now."

The black and white cat looked up.

"That's just what I want to talk about," she purred. "Our poor Pussum."

"Oh, *our* poor Pussum. Um — well, never mind *our* poor Pussum. He's in disgrace. He's torn my beautiful new chair with his claws."

"Yes," assented the black and white cat, thoughtfully, "I know; but do you always like to be pushed out of your favorite seat? And don't you sometimes have accidents, too?"

"What has that to do with it? Pussum is a cat. We gave him a good home — he should appre-

ciate it. He was a stray cat, and we took him in."

"I — I am a stray, too," murmured the black and white cat.

"Well, what of it? What has that to do with Pussum?"

"I know how much he must appreciate his nice home," the black and white cat purred softly. "I know he does, too, for he has told me about it, and of how good you are to him. I hope you will forgive him."

"Oh, well," I said, "I suppose we must. Go away now, and don't bother me."

The black and white cat nestled closer.

"One thing more," she said. "Do you know that I — I'm Pussum's comfort — his companion in grief and sorrow? and that I have no friends, or home?"

What was the use? After that,



the black and white cat took up residence in Pussum's cellar, and ate out of Pussum's pan. Their family came along in time to brighten the dull winter days. There were three of them, and the resemblance was quite strong on both sides.

I have never seen a prouder mother than the black and white cat. As for Pussum, his interest was one of curiosity rather than of paternal solicitude. He removed his quarters to a distant part of the cellar, perhaps so that he might enjoy a night's rest. When I brought him to the box of excelsior, and dropped him down among his family, he seemed disturbed, and the lavish endearments of the black and white cat, who put her face to his and purred and murmured and caressed him, only caused him to draw away with

mingled embarrassment and indifference.

"Aren't you ashamed, Pussum?" I said.

"Just like a man," purred the black and white cat.

We were now somewhat overwhelmed with our feline riches. The Precious Ones were delighted with the family below stairs, and it seemed a difficult problem. In time we became rather interested ourselves, and the problem became more difficult. We were justly outraged one morning, when the Little Woman came in and told me that a dog — the butcher's, probably — had killed the black and white mother cat, and that she had seen her lying stark and cold in the lower garden. Now the pretty little ones below stairs *must* be put away — there was no help for it. We spoke of how sweet they had

become, and how the Precious Ones loved them. We recalled all the many good qualities of the mother cat, and spoke of her fond attention and gentleness, denouncing the butcher and his cruel dog in unmistakable terms.

Then I went down to do my duty. On the way I passed the sideboard, where a tall bottle stood. I stopped and poured out a deep, fiery draught. I suppose other executioners do that, too. Then I went below.

It was rather dim there. I could not see, but as I approached the box I heard a strong purring, as of a large cat. "Poor, noble Pussum," I thought, "he has shown his true character by taking charge of these motherless little ones." Then suddenly I started, for with eyes grown accustomed to the dusk I was looking down, not at Pus-

sum, but at the black and white cat, tenderly nursing her babies. She seemed warm and uninjured, and not stark, by any means.

I ascended to the garden. There, sure enough, was a dead feline, — almost her duplicate, — perhaps a long lost twin brother, who had returned to die. I disposed of him decently, then, taking our own black and white cat in my arms, I ascended to the Little Woman. She was sewing quietly when I put the gentle pussy in her lap.

I thought the Little Woman would be pleased, and shed tears of joy at this happy surprise. Instead of that, she jumped, quite suddenly, altogether regardless of the fate of the fallen and frightened tabby.

“Why — what!” she began,  
“what on earth —”

I was obliged to explain, and we

both became hysterical, while the harmless mother cat flew out of the room and down-stairs to her darlings.

“Little Woman,” I said, at last, when I got able to say anything, “what you don’t know about cats would make an encyclopædia.”

## XXII.

*Casting up the Account.*

WE never seemed to get quite through paying. A number of times, when we thought we had settled the last and final bit of our liabilities, a new demand would be presented — a new hydra head to be smitten off, a new wound to be seared over and forgotten. The brace for the tall new chimney was an “extra,” of course. Likewise the storm-windows, and a new patent damper for the furnace, guaranteed to save anywhere from nine to ninety-nine per cent. of the coal used, and to supply at least double the heat. The spark-screen, andirons, and

other adjuncts for the fireplace — these, too, were outside the contract, and a good deal easier to buy than to pay for, even when the buying meant a mousing about in dusty antique stores, and the paying a simple matter of drawing a cheque.


It is easy to draw cheques when the account is replete — in fact, it is rather a pleasure to do so. I am sure the Little Woman used to regard me with an admiration akin to awe as I carelessly filled in the figures and name of payee, and signed my name with a neat flourish on the line below.

I suppose she wondered why I never let her do it, and very likely considered me selfish in arrogating to myself this important and rather agreeable duty, though I did not think of this at the time.

It presently became less agree-

able. When the third figure of our balance waned into the perspective until it became a thin line that would become a vanishing-point at the least touch, the construction of a cheque became a serious matter. It was no longer lightly conceived and carelessly put together, with decorative scrolls at the end, like a spring lyric. It became a thing of forethought and reflection, — to be wrought at last with a grave dignity that savored of the epic's solemn close, — with that feeling of sadness and longing that marks the end of each and every waning balance in the banker's till.

Oh, waning bank accounts! What stories you could tell me! I could write forever repeating only those tales, and if I repeated them well and truly, the world would always listen to that echo of hope and struggle, to the sigh and





whisper of decline. Writers there are who bewail that there is nothing left to say. Nothing left! Give me a banker's ledger, and in five minutes I will show you a hundred starting-points, each written in the crimson hue of life, each leading back to a story as new, and as old, as every emotion is new and old in a life of time and change. Comedy, tragedy, farce — they all are there, on the red-ink side. And they are good stories — I know, for I have produced material for a number of them myself. Only those were too tragic. Some day I shall persuade my friend the banker — if he remains my friend — to start me on the comedies — if he can point them out.

As I was saying, our balance became a feature of consideration, even of discussion. There were a good many things we still needed

in the way of furniture and decorations, now that our habitation was to our liking. We also needed clothes. When we sat down in our rather imposing rooms, in which there were a few good old pieces of furniture, and some truly antique rugs, the fact that our apparel was also good and old did not give pleasure to the Little Woman.

She became almost disagreeable about it one day, when I was arguing for a new chair, and declared that we looked like tramps that had got in while the folks were away.

I still urged the chair. I said that clothes were a matter of display and vanity. Also that they were transient and fleeting, while the chair would be the comfort of a lifetime. Whereupon, the Little Woman stated that there were certain garments that were not used

for display, except in magazine advertisements, and that these, as well as the chair, were matters of comfort, and needed a good deal more. She insisted that we had laid out enough on extraneous luxuries for one year, and that there were a few things we might forego, in order to be decently clad.

To do the Little Woman justice, I may say that I believe her general tendency is rather toward furniture than raiment—this being the true collector spirit, and to be commended. She had smothered her better inclination, this time, and was ready to sacrifice the chair for a silk waist and something to go under it. She meant to have garments, whatever the cost. You shall see how she was punished.

We went together. Neither could quite trust the other alone in

the department-store revel that was to follow the purchase of the waist. The fascinations of a department store are too great to be resisted singly. Even working together, and in full accord, we yielded oftener than was good for our balance-sheet, or for the prospect of the new chair any time within a period when we might reasonably hope to need comforts of the flesh.

We didn't pay as we bought. There is great saving of time in getting a transfer-card, and a greater certainty of prompt delivery in having goods come C. O. D. When we got through, we had bought most of the things we could think of; also, a good many we would never have thought of without seeing them, and that we couldn't remember when we were on the train going home.

I had not counted the exact amount of our debauch, but had run the figures up loosely and liberally, and, realizing that the end was now inevitable, drew a cheque next morning for our full balance. Then I went away, leaving the cheque and the obsequies in the hands of the Little Woman. If the amount was not quite enough, she was to make it up out of her weekly purse. If it was too much, she was to keep the change.

By some strange quirk of fortune it was too much. It was several dollars too much. The Little Woman was elated until the driver regarded the cheque rather doubtfully, and decided that he couldn't give money for it. He would give the goods freely enough. The amount of them was fully ten times as much as the change coming, but they were only goods. Money was

a different matter. He had probably heard of bogus cheques. This might be one of them. He couldn't exchange good money, however little, for a bogus cheque. Perhaps he was a new driver.

The Little Woman's argument was of no avail. He was good-natured, but he was firm. He was also ingenious. He suggested that another cheque for the correct amount would set everything straight. If the missus only had another cheque, now, she could write it to fit the figures of the bill.

The Little Woman hesitated. She had never been allowed to perform this especial and sacred rite, though she had signed almost every other kind of paper, from a receipt for a load of coal to a first mortgage, with coupons. A cheque seemed of less importance

than these. Besides, a new cheque would leave a balance as the starting-point of a new account. We were as one; why not?

She told me about it when I got home. It seems she had certain misgivings by that time — probably the promptings of a subconscious memory of banking matters and a cashier's arbitrary requirements in the matter of individual signature. It was too late to do anything that night. The bank was closed long ago, and I did not think it wise to spend the night in looking up the president, or even the cashier, to explain.

Besides, such explanation as I could invent quickly did not suit me. I wanted to sleep on the matter, and take it up fresh in the morning. Then maybe I could make up something that would

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keep the Little Woman in the background.

I don't think she slept a great deal. She had a growing idea that an officer would be waiting downstairs in the morning, and that she would never look on our Precious Ones or her silk waist again. I consoled her with the suggestion that, while ignorance of the law was regarded as no excuse, there were certain extenuating circumstances — that I thought the Precious Ones would hardly be grown, and that the silk waist might be in fashion again by the time she returned to gladden our hearts once more. Still, there was an uncertainty about the outcome that made the bright morning, the new waist, and our general assortment of furnishing goods as ashes to the Little Woman. She was sorry now. She wished she had let me buy the



chair. We had an early breakfast.

The banker regarded me rather doubtfully when I had finished my statement. He had known me on both sides of the ledger for some time, but this was a new phase.

"You say your — eh, house-keeper made a cheque, without a full knowledge of the seriousness attaching to the signing of names in that promiscuous way?"

"I — yes, that's about it."

I was covering the Little Woman's identity; also, a lack of knowledge not altogether unnatural to the sex, but which I felt that he, as a banker, might regard with scorn.

"Of course," he proceeded, "as one not directly related to you the matter appears somewhat more serious. Had it been really one

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of your family, now — your wife, for instance, or your — ”

“ Oh, but it’s just the same, you know,” I put in. “ I mean, of course, that she — that she’s really one of the family — that is, of course, it’s all right, I mean.”

I had not explained my plan to the Little Woman before starting. I had an undercurrent of wonder, now, what she would say if she could overhear my efforts to get her decently out of the pitfall into which her pride had tumbled us. I hoped she was enjoying her new things.

A clerk brought the cheque at that moment. It had just come in from the clearing-house, having travelled safely through several miles of circumlocution. The six inches between the banker’s hands and mine would be its hardest tug.

The banker scrutinized the signature severely.

“Rather delicate hand for a — housekeeper. How long did you say she had been in your service?”

I named the largest number of years within human limits, and reviewed the proprietary interest she had always felt in our affairs, — the amount of receipts and things she was daily called upon to endorse, — and gave another and improved version of the episode with the intelligent driver, who had been willing to give any amount of goods for my cheque, but no change. I abused the driver, — there was no harm in doing that, — he wasn't there, and it wouldn't have hurt him, anyhow. I think the driver saved the situation. The banker took a hand with me, at abusing him. Then we were united against a common en-

emy, and the Little Woman was safe.

I thought she would be tearful and contrite and grateful when I arrived with the news that it was all right and that she was to remain with us. I suppose she really was grateful, and I know that she was glad, for she went and put on all her new things and was so proud and had such an air that I didn't dare for the life of me to tell her the "housekeeping" details of my interview with the banker, and have not mentioned them till this day.

## XXIII.

*City Guests.*

**D**URING the progress of our building we had not mingled with the social whirl. For one thing, we had no time; and then our house was in poor condition to receive guests. We did not encourage visitors from town, and those who did come were glad enough to plead important duties or engagements, and take the first train that would carry them far from our environment of falling bricks and flying shingles.

But with the departure of W. Braikup and the other minions of Belial, and with the gradual restoration of order, we began to re-

member those who had brightened our old van-dwelling days. We wished to knot up the loosened ties of friendship, and to show them what we had been doing. We didn't feel exactly proud, I think, but we did want them to see that through a summer's toil and tribulation we had reached at last something besides disordered rooms and undesirable smells, even though the latter were usually considered wholesome. We were not entirely settled, but would be, soon. We held a consultation, and invited friends for the following Sunday.

During the next two or three days we set things to right here and there, leaving a good deal for Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, that the house might look fresh and orderly at the

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moment of arrival. I suppose we left more than we intended to.

When we had finished a scanty and hastily prepared Sabbath breakfast, and began considering the things still to be done before train time, we realized that we would better be getting the machinery in motion. I said I would put the finishing touches on the rooms while the Little Woman dressed the ducks and the Precious Ones, with the general assistance of Adelia, who was of a willing and pleasant disposition, but deliberate of movement and not over-resourceful. We agreed that we wouldn't overdo matters. We wouldn't make too much of a spread on the dinner, or the appearance of the house. We said we didn't like to look fixed up for people, but to have things appear just natural and homelike, as they were

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all the time. Then I took a walk through the rooms with a view of locating a place of beginning.

It was not altogether easy to do. There seemed to be a good deal required to make our surroundings appear "just as they were all the time." Most everything needed dusting, and a good many things were not in the best places. I decided that I would begin up-stairs, and work down. I would take one end of the house or the other, and work along through the rooms and back through the hall, and so to the lower floor. Then I remembered that my garret was still higher up, and of special importance. I went up there.

It wasn't very bad, but there were several things to do, nevertheless. The fish-net which I was going to drape about the ceiling was still in a heap on the floor, and





"SHE WAS HANDLING A PAIR OF SIX-POUND DUCKS AS  
IF SHE WERE IN A GYMNASIUM"



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there remained some prints and posters to be tacked up, then a general straightening and final wiping, such as was needed below stairs. I went down for the carpet-sweeper, a broom, a dust-cloth and pan, some screw-eyes, a hammer, nails, tacks, and some advice from the Little Woman.

I found her already in action when I reached the kitchen. She was handling a pair of six-pound ducks as if she were in a gymnasium, directing Adelia in the matter of pots and pans, and heaping blood-curdling promises upon the Precious Ones, who were continuously in front of her with persistent inquiries as to when the train would arrive, what we were going to have for dessert, and when they were to be arrayed in their best clothing.

She paused long enough to ask

me if I was through, as she needed me to whip some cream for the charlotte russe. I answered very gently that I hadn't begun yet, and had come down to get her to help me find some things that I wanted. She stepped on Pussum's tail just then, and the two of us escaped frantically in different directions. When I got back to the garret I was willing to begin with such things as I had.

It is not easy to drape a large fish-net over a garret ceiling, and it takes time. When I stopped to look at my watch I grew cold. Then struggling with mesh and tangle I would grow hot again, and the stuff would drop down in my face, and catch in the claws of the hammer.

I got into a kind of fever at last, and when the thing was up and I was down to the real business of

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straightening and pulling and wiping, I found myself working with a rapidity that verged upon delirium as the moments flew. I suppose there were things that I overlooked, and other things that I dusted twice over. It was not material. When I had finished you probably could not have told which was which. Then I suddenly remembered two curtain-poles still to be put in place, with the curtains properly draped. Before I was entirely done with these I recalled that a small bric-à-brac shelf was to be tacked over one of the upper hall doors. It took two trips to the cellar to get ready to do this. On the way up I overtook the Little Woman, who had finally got things well along in the kitchen and was steering the Precious Ones toward the bathroom. She seemed rather sombre in her

manner, and I paused to cheer her.

"Don't overdo matters," I said, pleasantly. "We don't want to look fixed up for people. We want things to seem just as they are all the time."

I suppose she thought I meant this for irony, for she announced rather grimly that the matter was getting to be pretty nearly no joke so far as she was concerned, which remark somehow touched the safety-valve, and we both laughed hysterically, as was our wont. I was presently tacking away at the shelf, to the accompaniment of lamentation and protest, these being the natural manifestations of childhood when the functions of toilet are in progress.

The shelf did not fit very well. I became a bit annoyed before I finally got it fastened and a mug

and a plate in place on it. I rested the lower edge of the plate on the end of a tape-measure, letting the other end hang down. I had been obliged to look for the tape several times, and I wanted it to be in plain view when next it was needed. It hung directly in the doorway now, where I couldn't help seeing it. Then I became occupied with matters in the library, and forgot the tape, and the fact that the plate rested on the upper end of it. I was in a hurry when I came out. My time for dressing was very brief, indeed, and the tape swinging across my face added to my annoyance. I jerked it rather viciously. It came down. Also the plate that held it. The latter landed quite fairly on top of my head, and separated in a shower about me. My comment was heard by Adelia in the

kitchen, and put a sudden stop to the diversion in the bathroom. The Little Woman poked out her head to take account of the disaster.

"Don't overdo matters," she said, pleasantly. "We don't want to look fixed up for people. We want to seem just as we are all the time."

I suppose she thought that was humorous, but I found it impossible to seem amused. The plate had been a mended one, but it would never be mended again. I gathered up the fragments and hurled them with all my strength into the vacant lot adjoining. Then I came back and dressed with such dignity as the time limit would permit.

I was knotting my tie when I heard the wild whoop of announcement that "they" were com-



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ing! I gave a pull and a twist, and my collar came unbuttoned. I repeated some of the comment on the plate disaster, and tugged and perspired and leaped into my coat, gave my hair a lick or two, and looked in to see what the Little Woman was doing.

I had expected to find her in a state of unfinished preparation and mental distress. Nothing of the sort. She was already dressed and down-stairs, pulling things into shape in the lower hall, which in my perturbation I had overlooked. I hurried to her assistance.

We emptied an ash-receiver, put some filled vases in position, carried a chair from the hall into the parlor and a chair from the parlor into the hall, wiped the furniture and the books and picture-frames, turned the reversible table-cover dust side down, grabbed dolls from

the corners, trundled a small carriage into the playroom, flung broom, duster, carpet - sweeper, dust-pan, hammer, and tacks into the kitchen, and as the bell went off swung wide the door to our guests, smiling a joyous welcome, with the assurance that we were so glad they had come at last, as the Precious Ones had grown impatient, waiting.

XXIV.

*The Passing of Adelia — and  
Loula.*

WHEN once more the gloom of autumn gathered along the fields, when the pumpkin-vine lay blighted and blackened with the frost,—its golden store ripe for the gathering,—when the summer of our discontent had become as a closed link added to the chain of seasons, then also the gentle Adelia passed, and became a serene and simple annal of domestic history.

I find it difficult to speak of Adelia in a manner that will convey a fair impression of us all. She came to us in a time of sore

need, and she was with us through a period of many trials. That she was willing to remain with us through those weeks when all was hurly-burly—when lime-incrusted feet tramped back and forth over floors but lately swept, and when the kitchen range was filled with pots and pails of distressing mixtures—seems to me a fact worth recording with gratitude.

There were many good things about Adelia. She was a gentle, free-hearted soul, and her carefully-modulated speech, with its trace of the motherland, was all that could be desired. On the whole my feeling is that under the hard conditions of that season we did not live quite up to Adelia's level, and that we dragged her down.

It is true that she could not cook when she came to us, and she was

never able to construct a fire in the kitchen range, or to keep it over-night. These, however, were no great matters. I was willing to attend to the small matter of the fire, and both the Little Woman and myself rather enjoyed giving her lessons in cooking. She could boil water soon after she came to us, and almost immediately acquired the pleasant knack of coffee. She learned other things as the days passed, and while she never was what you might call a brilliant pupil, her willingness was in her favor, and she was fairly entitled to a diploma as "plain cook" when she graduated from our school.

As I was saying, I fear we demoralized Adelia. It was hard for even a very strong nature to survive that period when, as a friend expressed it, the top of the sugar-bowl was in the parlor and the

top of the parlor in the sugar-bowl. Adelia made an attempt at order and neatness when she came, but it was a hopeless undertaking. When it was given up, the tendency itself must have languished. Order was finally restored, and with the house fairly set in order we somehow thought it would stay so.

Not that we wished to be too clean. We had no desire to drive Happiness out the window with a broom, but it seemed to us that the small accumulation of dust and debris might be removed with so slight an effort, as compared with the former herculean tasks, that it would be mere play for Adelia to keep things "bright-shining as the sun."

I suppose that was just the trouble — it was too easy. After what we had endured, the daily accumulation seemed too little to

count. She was waiting for the customary inch or two of conglomerate to collect on the floor, for the gray windrows to gather along sills and sideboard.

In the gentlest manner possible we called her attention to these things. She aroused briefly and seemed willing to please; but lassitude was in her movement, and the sideboard and the glassware were marked with the curse of careless wiping. What Adelia needed was discipline, and this we could not give her. We are not strong on discipline at any time, and after that season of democratic household regulations and general sharing of discomfort, severity on our part was altogether out of the question. In a new place she would be a new broom, with a new mistress to set her in order. I think we all realized this. Then,

too, the summer was over, and winter in the country was not what she had desired.

We had grown fond of Adelia, and she had grown fond of us. The Precious Ones and the Tiny Small One loved her. They wept when she left us, and her own eyes were not dry. Some days later she returned briefly, with a distribution of gifts. Gentle Adelia! The dust has been removed many times since you left us, and every trace of our discontent has long since vanished. Our blessings and our good-will go with you. And, wherever you may be, may you find that unfaltering discipline and sustaining example, without which the best of service falters and the best of servants fail.

And now came Loula — Loula of the merry heart. She was a strong girl — full of youth and idiom, and sentimental songs. Her



youth and strength were commendable. Her songs were harmless enough, and pleased the Precious Ones, who, on the second day of her administration, were singing with rapture and what seemed unnecessary energy the rhythmic measures of "Come Back, Barney" and "Louisiana Lou."

Her idioms were more questionable. We endeavor to give the Precious Ones a fairly correct habit of speech, and our Adelia had been well-nigh free from the curiosities of the language as it is spoken between Fourth Avenue and the River of the East. Loula was a walking thesaurus of that terse and bracing vernacular of the East Side. Needless to say, the Precious Ones were "not slow in getting on to her curves." Within a week it would have been well-nigh impossible for them to speak of the

Tiny Small One as being fretful, when Loula repeatedly referred to her manner of protest as "chewing the rag."

It is true that Loula's forms of speech often had the advantage of brevity, which always means strength. Certain it is, they appealed to the ear of childhood. The Precious Ones "got a move on themselves," and before many days could "give points" to most of their associates. We recalled Adelia's cultured Hibernese, and wished that our Loula might be more like her in her modes of speech.

They had one thing in common. Neither of them could cook or attend to a fire when they came to us, and both received instruction. They mastered the art of cookery about equally well, but Adelia never learned to keep or cover a

fire, while Loula attained a fair knowledge of these matters about the end of the second month. Then she asked an increase of salary. When she got so she could turn off the dampers of the kitchen range, and, by leaving the top lid open a little, manage to hold fire over-night, she demanded more money or a diploma. We consulted, and decided to give her the diploma. And so another pupil graduated from our school and went forth to conquer. .

Like Adelia, Loula had certain commendable qualities, most of which I have already mentioned. In addition, I may say that she generally approved of our methods, and declared that my chafing-dish oysters were the best she "ever et." The taste for my welsh-rare-bits was rather less easy to acquire, but this she also achieved in time,

and as Pussum is gratified by the appearance of the mouse-trap, so Loula was likely to become merry and musical at sight of the chafing-dish.

Yet, on the whole, it was better that she should go. The Precious Ones had learned most of her songs and enough idioms to keep us busy for a year. Her departure reduced our baker's bill by one-half, and there were other substantial benefits. We agreed to give up taking pupils for a week or two, and have a sort of vacation. We began it by picking our pumpkins.

We had already tried them, and they were good. In fact, there never had been anything so good as those pumpkin pies out of our own garden. We kept them ready for instant demand at any hour of the day. Being in the edge of the Great American Pie-belt, we were

under no restrictions, and with the courage of our appetites served them regardless of rules or social condemnation. Now we would gather the final harvest.

We went down into the faded garden. On either side of the little gateway the morning-glories were a black tangle — their seeds dropping, to prepare for another summer a new wealth of vine and blossom. The bean-bushes were mildewed and scattered, the corn was withered, the okra stalks, still stiff and upright, held a few dry rattling pods, the little house on the compost-pile had vanished and left not a trace behind. A single spot of green — the parsley-bed — seemed as a splendid emerald amid a tangle of decay.

Hand in hand we walked among the ruined beds, recalling the day we had planted this, the mornings

we had gathered that, the things we had learned for another year. How small the little place looked now that it was empty! It hardly seemed possible that it could have held all we planted and so many weeds besides. It seemed as if one might hoe over the entire bit of ground in a few minutes. Yet I had put in several hours of certain very hot mornings in cleaning up even a portion of that fertile spot. Now it was over. There were no more mosquitoes, no more busy ants, no more butterflies. In one corner a dead bee clung to a purple thistle bloom. The weeds were dead, too, all except the chickweed, which, like kind words, blossoms in every season and can never die.

We turned to look at our pumpkins. In all directions where the aggressive green tendrils had

found their way the uncovered store now lay revealed, ripe and sweetened for the harvest. Our catalogue has stated that pumpkins of this variety often weighed as much as two hundred pounds each. I don't think ours weighed that much. Either they did not, or I have become a tower of strength. Two by two I carried them into the cellar, and made of them a pyramid of gold.

Then it was nightfall. The sky was heavy and overcast — the dry stalks about us complained in the chill wind of evening. Quietly we passed up the little steps, through the gate of withered morning-glories. Summer with its thorn and blossom was ended.

We stir the embers in the fireplace and put on a fresh log. The bright blaze leaps up the chimney,

figures dance on the wall, the shadow of the easy chair reaches out on the firelit floor. We have paid well for that blaze and that shadow, but now, as the year closes in and night and storm gather without, we put cost and discomfort by. Other summers will bring us other gardens—and other griefs. Never mind them now. The past is the past—the future still undreamed. “Come sit by my side and let the world glide, for we shall ne’er be younger.”



## XXV.

### *The Precious Ones.*

**W**HETHER or not the Precious Ones deserve a chapter to themselves is a matter of question. Whether they deserve a good many of the things they get, frequently becomes a disputed point, and they usually get the benefit of the doubt. So it will be now. Those who object may skip this chapter.

The Precious Ones rise early. At least, they wake early, and between their beds occur long and seemingly unnecessary conversations, which the rest of the household would willingly forego. Frequently the interchange of

ideas becomes a discussion over some point which was not material in the beginning, and is lost almost immediately in the rapid-fire exchange of "I did!" "You didn't!" "It was!" "It wasn't!" "You can't!" "I can so!" which might continue indefinitely but for authoritative interference and the general uprising of the household.

The Precious Ones do not dress immediately. They are full of the joy of life and a desire for food, but they are willing to restrain the latter for the benefits of a rough and tumble pillow fight, which sometimes requires severity to quell. The Tiny Small One finds interest in these matters, and abets any sort of *mêlée* or bedlam with waving arms and expressions of delight. Completing her first round in the race of life, — being carried most of the way, but get-

ting ready to creep and totter the remaining distance, — she has become a Precious One on her own account. When she puts her fore feet on the edge of her pen and squeals,—that is, I mean, when she puts her chubby hands on the edge of her crib and gives vent to her approval, she arouses our own enthusiasm; when she topples back, with feet waving in the empyrean, we are moved to pet names and poetry.

There she lay, the Tiny Small One, with the sunrise on her tresses, with her feet stretched up to heaven — waving wildly to the zenith. And the elders, there beholding, saw the silken sheen of morning, saw the feet that waved so wildly, and in tenderness they named her — “Foot-in-Air” the elders called her — “Foot-in-Air” and sometimes “Silk-top.”

Breakfast never comes soon enough for the Precious Ones, once they are ready for it. I fear our discipline is a fugitive and erratic quantity. I know we surrender at such times when all the authorities we have ever tried to read counsel firmness. A piece of toast or a cracker is easier to produce than a convincing argument, and is more soothing in its effects. I suppose we shall all pay dearly for that toast and cracker some day, but on the whole it seems worth a good deal when breakfast won't be on the table for ten minutes, and the Precious Ones are in no condition to wait for even a tenth of that period.

Outdoor life appeals to the Precious Ones. Hardly is their breakfast down when they are ready to face whatever the day has brought in the way of weather.

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Sun and storm, heat and cold, — all weathers look alike to them, and the matter of proper clothing is not well considered. They would go into zero weather bare-headed, bare-handed, perhaps even bare-footed, if we would let them. I have had my heart wrung by seeing meagrely clad children on the icy streets of the great city — little ones with tattered clothing and uncovered purple hands. I wonder if they really feel and mind these things as much as we think. I wonder, because I have seen the Precious Ones come in from stinging cold, their own little hands pinched and purple in spite of the nice warm mittens — in their pockets. I have known them to dash out, hatless, coatless, and mittenless, into weather that found its way through the warmest clothing I could carry. Verily it would

seem that the wind is tempered to childhood; or, it may be, that childhood is tempered to withstand the wind.

On very bad days, life in the playroom is hilarious and interesting. It is particularly so during and after the Christmas period, when new games and toys enliven the festivities and enhance the vigor of debate. Their forms of argument seem curious, and not always bearing on the point in hand. They are more than likely to become personal. In the matter of a Lotto score, for instance, it would be thought convincing for one to remark:

“ You’ve got green hair! ”

And the other:

“ You’ve got plaid hair! ”

“ You eat grasshoppers! ”

“ You eat snakes! ”

It is almost impossible to under-

stand what a matter of personal appearance, or diet, has to do with Lotto, or why snakes should be considered the final word. Certain it is that all hope for peaceful adjustment ceases at this point, and higher powers are obliged to step in to avoid carnage and mortality.

I suppose there are children who do not quarrel. I know there used to be — many of them. I met them in my Sunday-school books. They had a habit of dying in the last chapter. Perhaps that is why goodness has become scarce and unpopular in these later days. Remembering those stories I should grow uneasy if I saw the Precious Ones becoming saintly. Not that they are always belligerent, or even noisy. There are whole hours when they play in the fondest harmony, and when the sweetness of childhood is unal-

loyed. Perhaps there have been whole days of this sort. It seems doubtful, for I think I should have been frightened, and remembered the circumstance.

The Precious Ones are given to anniversaries. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, and all other calendar holidays, are a matter of course. Then there are all the birthdays, each of which is duly observed with feasting, friends, and ceremony. That Pussum's birthday must remain unknown to us is regarded as a misfortune, and there has been a movement toward getting the powers to set a day when proper observance might be made of an event so important to us all.

Then we have other days of rejoicing. The day of our removal to the country is one of these, and always during September we pack



a basket and go to a little field above the Harlem River, where in the old van-dwelling days we found a bit of rural green, and a breath of trees and flowers. This we call our "High-bridge Day," and the little man who near by sells ginger ale and peanuts and coffee welcomes us each year with a pleasant smile of remembrance, and waves us a fond adieu at parting. We shall have as many holidays by and by as they have in Italy, where the government has been obliged to take the matter in hand, with a view to securing at least one or two days in the week for the performance of labor.

The Precious Ones are democratic, and their choice of friends interests me. Our Elder Hope in particular is ultra-socialistic in her selections. I said to her one day:

"Who is that dingy little girl

that spent the afternoon with you?"

"Oh, why, that's Bessie! Her mamma washes for Mrs. Briggs!"

"Um — nice little girl?"

"Just lovel-ly!"

"And that other little — eh, girl. That one out on the lawn this morning?"

"Why, that's Hattie! Her papa is a dirt-digger!"

"Oh! — ah — certainly — any special kind of dirt?"

"No, just dirt. It comes up out of the street. Sometimes he finds things in it!"

"Dear me! How exciting! Nice little girl?"

"Um, yes! Nicer even than Bessie!"

Of course there was nothing more to be said. I have always stood for democracy, myself, and have maintained that those who

toil at the tub, and those who go down into the dirt and dig, are the life and sinew of our system, and not to be despised.

Yet the Hope is not without aspiration. She has some thought of being a princess, with "proud" dresses and "blushy" hair, or a school-teacher — she isn't quite certain which. On the whole, she thinks she would prefer to "sell a candy-store" as a regular thing, and be a princess or a school-teacher for recreation. There was a time when she aspired to become a laundress, but she appears to have outlived this dream.

The candy-store ambition is shared by the Younger Joy, who is of modest tastes, and satisfied with anything that resembles chocolate. The Hope is of livelier imagination. Then, too, she has overdone the chocolate tendency, and cannot

now understand why any one should ever want to see chocolate again. This is likewise true of birthday cake with pink icing. The Joy never overdoes these matters. The effort to do so has been a failure. Chocolate, pink icing, lemonade, charlotte russe, and what not, separately or together, it matters little. Divided they may stand, but united they fall, and the destroyer of medleyed richness retires only to return again, uninjured, undismayed, and unappeased. I have known men that would give a million dollars for ten minutes of the Joy's digestion.


The Hope is inclined to look forward and to reflect. She informed me a few days ago that she had decided not to marry yet, because she might be sorry for it. "You see," she added, "I might find

somebody I'd rather have," which, on the whole, seemed a mature conclusion for her years. She added that she was afraid she might marry a burglar. She had read about a little girl whose father was a burglar, and, having decided that I was hardly fitted for this profession, her next danger seemed the chance of marrying one. The Joy cares nothing for such possibilities. Cake with raisins and a largess of chocolates cover the Joy's entire speculative field.

The Hope is devout. If she omits any feature of her prayers, she will begin them over. The Joy, more reckless in the matter of ritual, is willing to skip every other line of "Now I lay me" — so taking a short cut to grace.

I am likely to overdo this chapter. The subject to me seems in-

teresting, and there is a good deal I would like to say on the theme of child culture that isn't set down in any of the books we have tried to read. I have mentioned, I believe, that our discipline is uneven and not at all in accordance with the rules laid down by the heart-hungry, childless women who have time to think and write of such things. We have tried to be as they would have us, to govern with dignity and calm purpose, but we can't do it. Our discipline is erratic. Our punishment is likely to be summary, and in the nature of a surprise. After reading a chapter of the authorities, we have agreed between ourselves that as parents we are probably the poorest examples in the world — that a day's record of our home doings would blacken any book ever written on household government.



Yet somehow we love the Precious Ones, and, strange as it may seem, they profess to love us — not only in the hour of favor, but also in the moment of their direst disgrace and sorrow. Perhaps even this will count for something in the end.

I would not have it understood that we do not reason with the Hope and the Joy. We have wasted a good deal of energy in that way. That is, of course, it may not have been wasted, but reasoning with the Precious Ones always seems a good deal like saying your prayers; you never can tell when you are making an impression.

The hardest hour comes with the day's close. Then they are possessed with a mighty weariness of both flesh and spirit, and are correspondingly difficult. It is the

time designated by Mr. Longfellow as the Children's Hour, and far be it from me to gainsay him. It is theirs beyond a doubt, though there have been evenings when for a brief period it seemed to be the special province of one not often named in polite society. Of course, anything like punishment is worse than useless at such a time. As well trample flowers for bending before the wind. The clouds gather. The storm breaks. Life becomes strenuous and unreal. But five minutes later, when all are tucked up snug, as we pass from one couch to another and look down into rosy, sleeping faces, it is as if we could hear the whisper of angels' wings.



XXVI.

*The Things I Have Not Told.*

**T**HIS is not a story with a purpose. If it had a purpose in the beginning, I have forgotten what it was, and if any reader has come this far, he will probably agree with me that both of us have had enough to bear without the burden of teaching or being taught with carefully turned phrases and theories finely spun.

On the whole, it has been a sort of general unburdening, — a kind of experience-meeting, — and I suspect that more than one reader, if I am so fortunate as to have more than that, may be reminded of troubles of his own, per-

haps even moved to speak of them, with no other purpose than that relief of spirit which is said to follow confession.

There are a good many things which I have not told. There are experiences which, with the aid of a hypnotist, I have been able to forget. Others I have omitted for the reason that the comic papers, so-called, have told and retold and overtold them until they have lost all point and flavor, and appeal now only to a few benighted flat-dwellers who lack the desire or the courage to become "commuters," as we are termed, and to the resident of Todd's Switch, who wouldn't know a real commuter if he saw one fully panoplied and lowering the record in a race with the 8.15 train.

Nobody else reads comic papers any more. The intelligent city man

has little time for their gaudy plates and their threadbare humor, while we of the suburbs do not need to brighten our days with artificial means. We have more real fresh genuine humor in one day than would be conceived in a lifetime by the rusty, dusty scribbler of "comics," who never gets nearer to the country itself than the ferry landing, and whose chief idea of suburban life is a picture of a wild creature with a bag in one hand and a piece of pie in the other leaping fences and ditches to overtake a train that is some miles away in the red, white, and blue landscape.

Let us protest against this picture. I have never eaten pie while running for a train. If I ever should, I would not attempt to jump ditches and fences unless it was very firm pie, such as grows

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in Harlem, and not the mellow pumpkin or the mellifluous mince and custard of rural life. I have hurried to catch trains, of course. Breathes there a man who hasn't? I once fell down, and my hat rolled under the train. But then I simply waited until the last car passed, picked it up — the hat — and climbed on the rear platform — of the car. There was no disgrace in that — nothing to call for a lurid picture in mittens, muffler, and arctic overshoes, as we have been only too often depicted by the artist who is professionally funny. I have never worn mittens and muffler and arctic overshoes when I needed to catch a train. I should have missed my train if I had.

There is another comic-paper idea which I feel has been overdone. I refer to the home-coming with innumerable boxes and bun-

dles and fruit-trees and clothes-horses, attached and piled as long as they will hang on. I have never brought home a clothes-horse, nor as many bundles as the artist puts into his pictures. I couldn't do it. I have tried repeatedly, and I know the pictures are exaggerated. To be sure, I have had some curious assortments, and I may say that it is no "cinch" to get home with a lawn-mower, six window-screens, and a pound of coffee, even when the coffee is in a little gunny-sack and the screens are supposed to be securely tied together.

Of course they were not securely tied. They slipped and wobbled a good deal, while the little bag of coffee had a way of sliding from the place I put it, just as I had carefully arranged matters and was getting ready to move on again. I had thought the firmly

sewed little gunny-sack a good idea, but it wasn't. Had it been a paper sack I should have distributed the coffee in various pockets, and it couldn't then have slipped from under my arm or my chin at inopportune moments.

After all, the problem was easy enough. I merely put the mower down on the ground where it belonged, tied the screens on top of it, and laid the coffee on the screens. Then quite comfortably I mowed my way home, while neighbors came out to observe and commend my ingenuity.

Speaking of mowing, that is another comic-paper idea. The commuter at home is supposed to be *always* mowing. In summer he is thought to begin the day with a buzzing dewy round, and to follow the whizzing wheel of toil into the far dimness of evening. Let us

object to this! Let us declare that we do not always mow! Why, I have let my lawn go without mowing for ten days at a time, and then traded a man two suits of clothes and a pair of shoes to operate on it with a scythe. I have given up mowing my terrace altogether. I gave it up one hot day when the mower veered off to one side, and dragged me down. In the instant when my nose was parting the grass, and the events of my past life were as a panorama before me, I resolved never to mow that terrace again. A vow made at such a time is sacred.

There are other things that I have not dwelt upon in these chapters. I might have told of the Italian umbrella mender and razor grinder, who caught us in a moment of weakness and mended the Little Woman's umbrella,

ground her scissors, and my axe and razor. I hope he will call again some day. The razor and scissors are ready for him. Also the axe. They are no longer sharp, but they will serve my purpose. I shall ask him to be seated, and I will shave him with the razor, and I will cut his hair with the scissors. Then, if he still survives, I shall use the axe.

I also contemplated doing a chapter on a trained nurse I had. I need not go into the particulars of my ailment. Suffice it to say, it was something that great men often die of, and I was scared. I know now what a trained nurse means. It is a nurse trained to sleep under any circumstances. I have never seen one so well trained as mine. She was slightly deaf, and snored, while I watched the clock and threw my shoes at her



when it was medicine-time. She enjoyed her visit with us. She liked the Little Woman's cooking, and when the Little Woman fell ill she liked mine, and stayed on. She said my chocolate was something unusual, and she had such passion for my breakfast-food that once, in a moment of preoccupation, I addressed her as Mrs. Pettijohn.

I meant to have made something out of a shopping expedition of the Little Woman's — a sort of bargain-counter disaster that occurred when she wandered off one day alone. Not that the Little Woman hasn't good taste, but we all have these moments of aberration and economy. She came home with some flower vases that I have never been able to find since. When a week later she suggested that I needed a smoking-table, and I

said, "Don't *you* buy it, honey," she left the room.

Yet she had her revenge. We needed a butter-dish, and I said I would bring it home next day. I didn't like the assortment I met. They seemed too big. Then just as I was leaving I discovered a number of smaller ones on a side-table, and asked the clerk why she hadn't shown me these before. She was silent—in contrition, I thought—while I looked at them and expressed approval. They were not round, like the others, nor so large. Neither were they so deep, though they had the same little movable bottoms, and seemed in every way desirable. Arriving home, I exhibited my purchase with enthusiasm.

"Isn't it pretty?" I said. "Don't you think it a jolly butter-dish?"

A peculiar smile grew about the Little Woman's mouth.

"Why, yes, I suppose it would do for butter," she said, "but don't you think it would be better for soap?"

I find that I have overlooked our colored friends, the "wash-ladies," who begin so well that we grow exuberant in each new discovery. They start in by arriving promptly at seven, thankful to begin the day of labor with a word of greeting and a cup of coffee. At the end of the second week they arrive at eight, to discuss their family affairs over a hot breakfast. At the end of the fourth week they drop in at nine, and expect mince pie, served with cheese on the side. Then, having reached our limit of luxury, and having induced us to give away a number of things we shall need ever after,

they disappear and send one of their relations.

Also there was the colored man, who dug a ditch for me and afterward borrowed two dollars. He assured me that if I were to send for him at midnight he would come and work it out. I suppose I made a mistake in not sending for him at that time. When one morning I did send, he failed to appear, but returned word that his mother-in-law was dead. Two weeks later I sent for him again. That killed his sister-in-law. I gave up after that. I feared I should destroy all his wife's people.

These are among the chapters I did not write. Most of them are by the way, and not necessarily a part of that suburban happiness.

To those contemplating rural life I may say that living in the